View metadata, citation and similar papers at core.ac.uk

brought to you by CORE

provided by ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University

Georgia State University
ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University

Educational Policy Studies Dissertations | Department of Educational Policy Studies

Spring 5-16-2014

Push Back on Push Out: Parent Organizing for School Discipline Reform

Adrienne C. Goss
Georgia State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/eps_diss

Recommended Citation
Goss, Adrienne C., "Push Back on Push Out: Parent Organizing for School Discipline Reform." Dissertation, Georgia State University, 2014.
https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/eps_diss/111

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of Educational Policy Studies at ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Educational Policy Studies Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gsu.edu.

ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, PUSH BACK ON PUSH OUT: PARENT ORGANIZING FOR SCHOOL DISCIPLINE REFORM, by ADRIENNE C. GOSS, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Education, Georgia State University.

The Dissertation Advisory Committee and the student's Department Chair, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty. The Dean of the College of Education concurs.

_____
Joyce E. King, Ph.D.
Committee Chair

_____
Richard D. Lakes, Ph.D.
Committee Member

_____
Janice Fournillier, Ph.D.
Committee Member

_____
Kristen L. Buras, Ph.D.
Committee Member

_____
Date

_____
William L. Curlette, Ph.D.
Chair, Department of Educational Policy Studies

_____
Paul A. Alberto, Ph.D.
Interim Dean
College of Education

AUTHOR'S STATEMENT

By presenting this dissertation as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for the advanced degree from Georgia State University, I agree that the library of Georgia State University shall make it available for inspection and circulation in accordance with its regulations governing materials of this type. I agree that permission to quote, to copy from, or to publish this dissertation may be granted by the professor under whose direction it was written, by the College of Education's director of graduate studies and research, or by me. Such quoting, copying, or publishing must be solely for scholarly purposes and will not involve potential financial gain. It is understood that any copying from or publication of this dissertation which involves potential financial gain will not be allowed without my written permission.

_____

Adrienne C. Goss

NOTICE TO BORROWERS

All dissertations deposited in the Georgia State University library must be used in accordance with the stipulations prescribed by the author in the preceding statement. The author of this dissertation is:

Adrienne C. Goss
4214 High Park Lane
East Point, GA 30344

The director of this dissertation is:

Dr. Joyce E. King
Department of Educational Policy Studies
College of Education
Georgia State University
Atlanta, GA 30302-3977

CURRICULUM VITAE

Adrienne Chevon Goss

ADDRESS: 4214 High Park Lane
East Point, GA 30344

EDUCATION:

Ph.D.	2014	Georgia State University Educational Policy Studies, Social Foundations
M.A.	2003	Eastern Michigan University Social Foundations, Teaching for Diversity
B.S.	1999	Eastern Michigan University Mathematics for Secondary Education
Cert.	2005	Math 6-12, Gifted In-Field Endorsement

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

2011-Present	High School Math Teacher-Gifted Atlanta Public Schools, Atlanta, GA
2010-2013	Graduate Teaching & Research Assistant Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA
2010-2012	Policy Researcher Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education, Atlanta, GA
2007-2009	Middle School Math Teacher Clayton County Public Schools, Jonesboro, GA
2005-2007	High School Math Teacher Atlanta Public Schools, Atlanta, GA
2002-2005	Middle School Math & Language Arts Teacher Herlong Cathedral School, Detroit, MI

PROFESSIONAL SOCIETIES AND ORGANIZATIONS:

American Educational Studies Association
Georgia Association of Educators
National Education Association

PUBLICATIONS:

King, J. E., Goss, A. C., and McArthur, S. (2014). Recovering history and the "Parent Piece" for cultural well-being and belonging. In J. E. King & E. Swartz (Eds.), *Re-Membering History in Student and Teacher Learning: An Afrocentric Culturally-Informed-Praxis*. New York: Routledge.

Goss, A. C. (2013). Five vignettes: Stories of teacher advocacy and parental involvement. *The Qualitative Report, 18,* 1-18.

Goss, A. C. (2011). Teaching black girls: Resiliency in urban classrooms. *Educational Studies, 47*(3), 306-310.

Rickman, D. & Goss, A. (2012, January). *Top ten issues to watch in 2012: Eighth edition.* Atlanta: Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education.

Walker, S. & Goss, A. (2011, February). *Top ten issues to watch in 2011: Seventh edition.* Atlanta: Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education.

Goss, A. (2010, June). Recession woes: The impact of state budget cuts on Georgia's public schools. Atlanta: Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education.

Goss, A. (2010, June). Policy brief: Common Core State Standards initiative. Atlanta: Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education.

Walker, S. & Goss, A. (2010, June). *Education policy primer: 2010-11 edition.* Atlanta: Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education.

PRESENTATIONS:

Goss, A., McArthur, S. A., & King, J. E. (2012, April). Engaging parents in culturally authentic assessment of heritage knowledge and contextualized teaching for black middle school students. Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association Conference, Vancouver, British Columbia.

Goss, A. (2011, March). Restoring our own: A reflection on the work of an African American female educator. Paper presented at the Southeastern Women's Studies Association Conference, Atlanta, GA.

Goss, A. (2011, February). A nationalist-ideological basis for the education of African-American students. Paper presented at the Southeast Philosophy of Education Society Conference, Decatur, GA.

ABSTRACT

PUSH BACK ON PUSH OUT: PARENT ORGANIZING FOR SCHOOL DISCIPLINE REFORM

by

Adrienne C. Goss

School-to-prison pipeline research and scholarship point to a need for parent and community involvement in addressing school discipline policies and culturally sensitive approaches to reducing disparities in school discipline. My research examined how members of a parent community organization worked to raise parents' awareness about and engage them in school discipline reform, including culturally sensitive approaches. I developed a culturally centered research study that privileged my participants' cultural and epistemological positions. The primary data sources were qualitative interviews and documents. A thematic analysis revealed that the participants' cultural heritage formed the foundation for the organization's work. Key organizational processes identified include raising awareness by learning new information, linking to community resources to engage in advocacy and build power, and leading parents through inquiry-based activism. Organizational learning and program adjustments showed promise of parents' ability to influence local school district educational practices.

PUSH BACK ON PUSH OUT: PARENT ORGANIZING FOR SCHOOL DISCIPLINE REFORM

by

Adrienne C. Goss

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in
Educational Policy Studies
in
the Department of Educational Policy Studies
in
the College of Education
Georgia State University

Atlanta, GA
2014

Copyright by
Adrienne C. Goss
2014

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to thank:

My "Mama" Joyce King who read about a dozen drafts of my chapters, giving me feedback in the middle of the day and in the middle of the night. You helped me see the power of my work and encouraged me to be fearless. I don't have the words to say how much I appreciate you.

My other "Mama" Janice Fournillier who fed me spiritually, emotionally, mentally, and physically. You have been such a tremendous blessing.

Richard Lakes, who took great care of me during the first four years of my program and always made sure that I was on track. You helped me to get the most out of this PhD experience.

Kristen Buras—the only person I know who exudes as much passion in an email as she does in person. Your fire is contagious!

Deron Boyles, who taught me to say what I mean. Your class made room for me to develop the epistemology and methodology that I used in this work. I'm eternally grateful; working with you has been invaluable.

Shonda Lemons-Smith—you are such an encourager. I am so glad that I met you early in this journey.

The faculty and staff at Georgia State University who challenged me to read broadly and think deeply. I am certainly better because of you.

My colleagues in the Educational Policy Studies Department and the Urban Education Think Tank (UETT) who graduated before me and are coming behind me. You have become my family.

Everyone who participated in this study. I greatly appreciate the sacrifice of your time and for trusting me with your stories. I hope that I have represented you well.

My family and friends for enduring my repeated need to leave functions early (if I attended at all) so that I could go study or read or write…or just sleep. Thank you for your encouragement and support.

My nieces who sacrificed many sleepovers at my house so that they could one day call me "Dr. Auntie."

My ancestors who paved the way for me to be here.

The Almighty Creator of the heavens and earth who made me in His image to do amazing things in the world. This is only the beginning.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

ABBREVIATIONS

CDF	Children's Defense Fund
CJC	Community justice conferencing
DCP3	Dunham County Parents against Push-out Program
GED	General Educational Development
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
IEP	Individualized Education Program
IIRP	International Institute for Restorative Practices
ISS	In-School Suspension
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
OCR	Office for Civil Rights
OSS	Out-of-School Suspension
PBIS	Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports
PEP	Parent Empowerment Program
PTA	Parent-Teacher Association
RJ	Restorative Justice
SCLC	Southern Christian Leadership Conference
SNCC	Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee
TSRQ	Teacher-student relationship quality
VOM	Victim-offender mediation

PREFACE

Fresh out of college, I accepted my first teaching position at an alternative high school for students with academic and/or behavioral challenges. Although the majority of the students in the school district were White, most of the students in this alternative school were African American. I knew intuitively that the public school system was failing certain children, particularly children of color. What I did not fully understand was why they were failing, and I did not feel that my teacher training program fully prepared me to serve this population of students.

After teaching for just over a year, I returned to graduate school and enrolled in a master's degree program in social foundations. Through my studies I came to understand the systemic policies and practices that contribute to disparate schooling experiences for children of diverse backgrounds. As an African American woman, I have combatted others' attempts to relegate me to the margins, so I aspired to resist disciplinary and instructional practices that would marginalize and disadvantage my students. I resolved to be a teacher that promoted justice in my classroom and community. This, like many endeavors in life, was easier said than done. I have had numerous, incredibly frustrating experiences with children. Yet with every encounter, I grew in my ability to love children past their behavior and to continue to teach them as I would want someone else to teach my own children one day.

Importantly, I recognized that parents were critical to every effort I was making in the classroom. I believed that they should be informed and I valued their insights. I often began the school year contacting parents to learn about their expectations and to inquire about ways that I could support their children in the classroom. I wanted my first

contact with parents to be positive so that they would be open to my calling them later if their children began to struggle academically, behaviorally, or otherwise. In general, I have found that parents trust the schools. They believe that all is well with their children unless they hear something to the contrary. I want parents to know that this is not always the case, and that they have the right and the ability to question the practices in their public schools.

Of critical importance is questioning how schools address discipline challenges. Of even greater importance is offering schools an alternative to how they address discipline challenges. In an environment that blames parents (and teachers) for school failures, I want to encourage parents to demand that their local schools fulfill their legal and moral obligation to provide a quality education to every child. Parents can change the policies and practices affecting their children in school but too often they are unaware of their power to do so. Herein lies the value of this study. Parents *will* find teachers and community members who wish to collaborate with them and support their efforts. I am one; there are countless others.

There are countless other teachers, parents, and community members who see the long-term effects of a failure to intervene now in school reform. There are countless others who are committed to eradicating the policies and practices that are leading to school failure and disparities in school discipline. There are countless others who believe that they have a responsibility to fight for justice in schools. There are countless others who have the will and the desire, but may not have the resources, connections, or the understanding of how to channel their will into action. I hope that this study will add to

their number—to our number—countless others with the tools to push back on the policies and practices that are pushing way too many children out of school.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In 1975, the Children's Defense Fund (CDF) raised questions about school suspensions in a report entitled *School Suspensions: Are They Helping Children?* The CDF report brought to light the disproportionate rates of school suspensions by race. Brenda Townsend (2000) defines disproportionality in discipline rates as a situation in which suspension and expulsion rates among one group exceeds that group's percentage of the population by 10% or more. At the time of the CDF report, Black students represented 27.1% of school enrollment in districts for which the federal Office for Civil Rights (OCR) had data, but they comprised 42.3% of suspensions. (OCR currently uses Black or African American to refer to a person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa [OCR, 2009/2010].) In terms of numbers, the CDF report states that overall, White students comprised the largest number of suspensions, but Black students were suspended at twice the rate of any other ethnic group (CDF, 1975).

The report also revealed other issues with discipline that persist nearly 40 years later. According to the CDF, African American students were more likely to be suspended than White students, not because African American students misbehave more often than White students but because "many school districts treat black children differently from white children" (CDF, 1975, p. 14). Some version of this statement gets repeated again and again in studies on the disproportionate rates of exclusionary discipline—namely in-school suspension (ISS), out-of-school suspension (OSS), and expulsion—used with African American students. In fact, one study found that "White and Hispanic students were *more likely* than African-American students to commit

offenses that trigger mandatory expulsion[1]" (Fabelo, Thompson, Plotkin, Carmichael, Marchbanks, & Booth, 2011, p. 46). African American students continue to receive office referrals, suspensions, and expulsions at 2-4 times the rate of White students (Boyd, 2009; Skiba, Horner, Chung, Rausch, May, & Tobin, 2011). The rate of OSS, particularly for African American students, is especially troubling because studies from both the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) (2008) and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) (2005) suggest a link between overly harsh discipline policies and later involvement in the juvenile justice system (ACLU, 2008; Fabelo et al., 2011; NAACP, 2005; Nicholson-Crotty, Birchmeier, & Valentine, 2009). In fact, receiving one OSS in 9th grade correlates with being twice as likely to drop out of school (Losen & Martinez, 2013).

Daniel Losen and Tia Elena Martinez (2013) examined disciplinary data for the 2009-2010 school year and found that the disparities in discipline rates have not only persisted since the CDF report, but they have grown worse. Although, consistent with the CDF report, African American males continue to have the highest rate of suspension, Losen and Martinez determined that African American females in high school have the second highest rate. In other words, African American females were suspended at a rate higher than females or males of any other race, African American males excluded. At the middle and high school level, the rate of OSS has more than doubled from 11.8% to 24.3% for Black students of both genders, meaning nearly 1 out of every 4 Black students

[1] Disciplinary actions typically fall under the mandatory or discretionary category. Mandatory consequences are those for which a school must issue a suspension or expulsion in accordance with state law. Discretionary consequences typically are given for violation of a school code of conduct. Administrators can use their judgment when determining whether or not exclusionary discipline is warranted.

received at least one OSS during the 2009-2010 school year. Among Hispanic students, the rate has increased from 6.1% to 12%. The intersection of race/ethnicity and disability (including emotional, behavioral, physical, and learning disabilities[2]) is even more problematic. About 36% of all Black male students with a disability and 22% of all Hispanic male students with a disability received an OSS. Regardless of race, 19.3% of secondary students with disabilities were suspended in 2009-2010, which was more than twice the rate of suspensions (7%) among their non-disabled peers.

This research study examines how parents are working to address disparities in disciplinary consequences in a local school district. In the remainder of this chapter, I discuss the context for this research study. I present my research questions, the purpose and significance of this work, and my assumptions and limitations. I conclude with a discussion of the theoretical frameworks that I used to guide the design and analysis of this research study, including a framework for how power operates in community organizations.

The Context

The State

During the 2009-2010 school year, about 8% of public school students in the state where this study took place received at least one OSS. African American students were more than three times as likely to receive an OSS than all other students. About 69% of

[2] According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004, a child with a disability can have any of the following: autism, deaf-blindness, deafness, emotional disturbance, hearing impairment, mental retardation, orthopedic impairment, other health impairment (sometimes due to a health problem such as asthma, epilepsy, or sickle cell anemia), specific learning disability, speech or language impairment, traumatic brain injury, visual impairment, or any combination of these. See Building the Legacy: IDEA 2004. U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved February 9, 2014 from http://idea.ed.gov/

students receiving an OSS received it for nonviolent offenses. Although this problem is not specific to the state, it ranks among the top in the nation for the rate of OSS (State Department of Education, 2013).

Dunham County

The Dunham County Parents against Push-out Program (DCP3) and its parent training initiative and focus of this study, the Parent Empowerment Program (PEP) (both pseudonyms[3]), work with advocates throughout the state to support the work of discipline reform, but particularly within its school district of interest—Dunham. Dunham County is a suburb of a metropolitan city in the South. The county has grown considerably over the past fifty years and experienced its most rapid growth during the 1970s and 1980s. As recently as 1960, the county had a population of less than 44,000 but now has over 800,000 residents according to the 2010 U.S. Census. The county is home to one four-year college, one technical college, a public library system, and two public school systems—one large countywide district, and one independently run citywide school district ("Dunham" County Government, n.d.).

Dunham County Public Schools (DCPS) is among the largest school districts in the state ("Dunham" County Public Schools, n.d.). During the 2010-2011 school year, approximately 32% of the student body in DCPS was White, 29% was Black, 25% Hispanic, and 10% Asian (State Department of Education, 2012). The high school graduation rate was about 71% in 2012, compared to about 70% for the state. Dunham County's graduation rate was 84% for White students, 64% for Black students, 54% for

[3] All proper names, including names of the district, individual schools, organizations, churches, residential communities, and research participants, are pseudonyms.

Hispanic students, 83% for Asian students, and 33% for students with disabilities (see Figure 1) (State Department of Education, 2013).

There are clear disparities in the rates of high school completion by Hispanic and Black students and students with disabilities, which gives some indication of how well schools are meeting the needs of these students. The Office for Civil Rights (OCR) provides data that highlight similar disparities in school discipline rates. For instance, in 2009, although Hispanic students accounted for a quarter of the State's student population, they account for 27% of all referrals to ISS, 29.7% of referrals for OSS, and a third of all expulsions. Black students comprised 27.5% of the student population, but they accounted for 43.5% of referrals to ISS, 44.2% of OSS, and more than two-thirds of expulsions. In contrast, Asian students comprised 10% of the student population, but only 4% of referrals to ISS and 3.6% of OSS. White students comprised 33% of the student population, but only 20% of referrals to ISS, and 17% of OSS. No Asian or

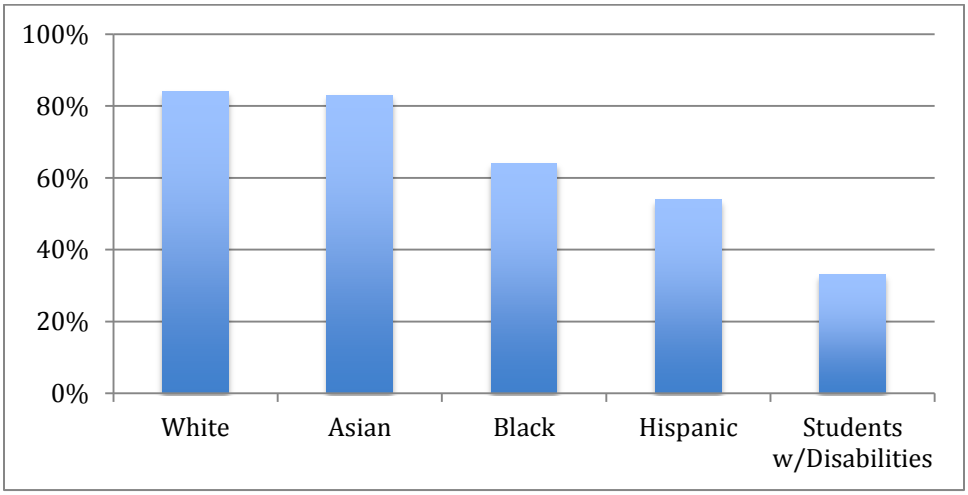

Figure 1. Graduation Rates in Dunham County, 2012

White students were expelled from Dunham County in 2009 (see Figure 2) (OCR, 2009/2010).

Communities

Several school attendance zones comprise Dunham County. The participants in this study participated primarily within these zones, which are all next to each other. These zones also represent some of the lowest graduation rates in the county. The westernmost zone is Zone 1. Zone 1 is home to Union High School, one of the more racially balanced high schools among the four zones. The Black, White, and Hispanic populations each comprise roughly 30% of the student body. The Asian population is less comparable, however, accounting for less than 10% of the students in the school. The students in Union High School fare somewhat better economically than students in other zones, with less than three-fifths of the students qualifying for free or reduced lunch. About 9% of the students have a disability in accordance with the Individuals with

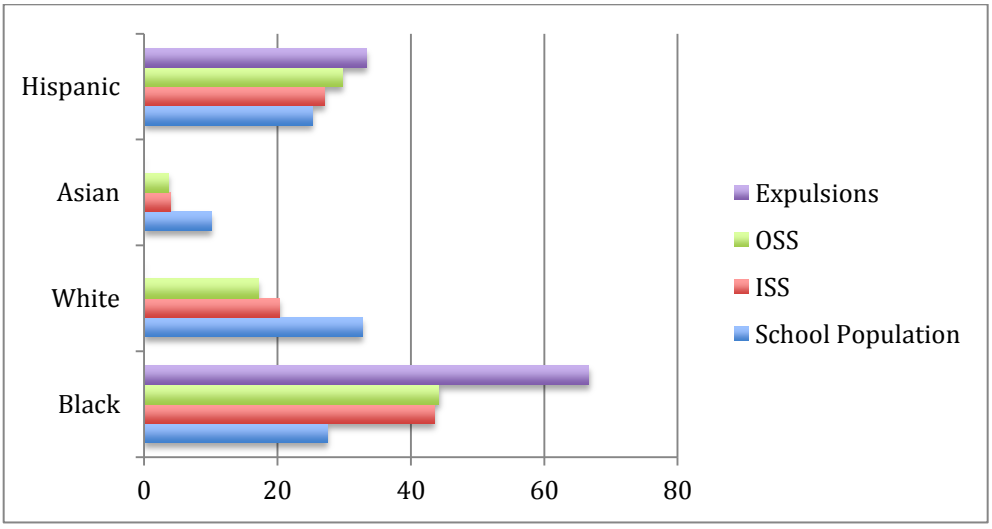

Figure 2. Percentage Expulsions, ISS or OSS Referrals in Dunham County by Race, 2009

Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Interestingly, although the racial composition of Black, White, and Hispanic students in Union High is somewhat even, their encounters with discipline is not. In 2009, the Office for Civil Rights reports that Union High assigned 40% of all referrals to ISS to Black students and another 40% to Hispanic students. In contrast, Union High assigned only 13% of ISS referrals to White students. Similarly, Union High assigned 41% of all OSS to Black students, and 40% to Hispanic students. In contrast, Union High only gave 13% of OSS to White students.

Southeast of Zone 1 is Zone 2. Zone 2 is home to Drake High School. Almost 3 out of 5 students is Hispanic and 13% have limited English proficiency. Drake is a Title I school and nearly 9 out of 10 students qualify for free or reduced lunch. Just over 10% of the student body has a disability. The demographics of one of Drake's feeder schools, Young Middle, are similar. Less than half of the students at Drake High School leave with a diploma in four years.

East of Zone 2 is Zone 3, home to Trenton High School. More than two-fifths of the student body is Hispanic and more than one-third is black. Three-fourths of the student body qualifies for free or reduced lunch. Nearly 13% has a disability. Like Drake, less than half of the students at Trenton graduate in four years.

In all of the zones, White students receive OSS at a rate lower than their proportion of the student body. The numbers are mixed among Hispanic students, with a slightly lower rate in Zone 3, but higher rates in Zones 1 and 2. Among Black students there is an overrepresentation of suspensions at all three high schools, with much larger discrepancies (see Table 1).

Table 1. *Summary of Out of School Suspensions by Race in Dunham County School Zones*

	% of Black Students in Student Body	% of Black Students Receiving OSS	% of Hispanic Students in Student Body	% of Hispanic Students Receiving OSS	% of White Students in Student Body	% of White Students Receiving OSS
Zone 1: Union High School	29%	41%	32%	40%	27%	13%
Zone 2: Drake High School	24%	26%	58%	64%	4%	3%
Zone 3: Trenton High School	35%	45%	44%	43%	7%	6%

Source: Office for Civil Rights Data Collection (2009/2010)

The Dunham County Parents against Push-out Program (DCP3)

The Dunham County Parents against Push-out Program (DCP3) began in an effort to raise awareness about discrepancies in disciplinary actions in the school district. Hope Faison, one of the co-founders of the organization, and another co-founder were doing advocacy work in the community when they began to notice some trends in how the school district was treating children. They made contact with a statewide community organizer who helped them to organize an interest meeting. About 40 people came to

that first meeting, including employees in the school system. After sharing and listening to each other's stories, the group decided to move forward in its efforts to organize around the problem.

DCP3 partners with other local and national organizations in order to accomplish its goals of raising awareness in the community about disciplinary discrepancies and changing policies that lead to these discrepancies. DCP3 offers three trainings free of charge to community groups in the area. The trainings include education about the school-to-prison pipeline, the school district's discipline policies, and steps for parents to take when a child receives a suspension. DCP3 also formulated a yearlong initiative to train parents. This initiative, the Parent Empowerment Program (PEP), is a training and advocacy project for parents of children in Dunham County Schools. Each year, the PEP members develop projects to increase awareness in their communities of the disparities in school discipline measures.

The Parent Empowerment Program

The Parent Empowerment Program (PEP) began with its inaugural class in 2011. PEP begins with a weekend retreat for all parents invited to join the organization. It is at the retreat where many parents first learn about the school-to-prison pipeline and the systemic problems in education. Hope also assigns parents to their project groups during this weekend. The projects are one of two major components of participation in PEP, the other being the monthly training sessions. PEP holds monthly training sessions from approximately 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturdays from September through January. Each training session brings experts from the state and throughout the country to speak on

issues related to school discipline reform. The program ends in March with a graduation ceremony where participants share the results of their community projects.

Research Questions

My research on the Parent Empowerment Program examined these research questions:

1. What role does the cultural heritage of the participants play in the organization's work?
2. What impacts has the organization had on the participants, community, and on reducing discipline disparities in the school system to date?
3. How did members of the organization work to raise parents' awareness about school discipline reform, and facilitate parents' involvement in culturally sensitive approaches to reducing disparities in school discipline?
4. What factors supported or hindered the organization's work?
5. What can the organization do to improve its efforts in the future?

Purpose

The school-to-prison pipeline refers to the combination of policies and practices, such as zero tolerance policies and OSS, which push children out of the classroom and into the juvenile justice and criminal justice systems (ACLU, 2008; NAACP, 2005). The literature on the school-to-prison pipeline points to a need for parent and community involvement in addressing school discipline policies, and an examination of culturally sensitive approaches to reducing disparities in school discipline. Yet few studies identify evidence that parent and community involvement or culturally sensitive approaches have made significant impacts on reducing disparities in school discipline, and even much of

this is anecdotal. In fact, most of the literature on community organizing in general does not exist in the scholarly literature, but consists of "foundation, nonprofit, and think tank reports" (Schutz, 2006, p. 716), although some recent works have begun to fill in this gap (Mediratta, Shah, & McAlister, 2009; Warren & Mapp, 2011). There is, therefore, a need for empirical research to generate knowledge and understanding about community organizing for education in general, and with regard to organizing to reform school discipline policies in particular. Such knowledge can be made available to schools and community organizations to improve education practices, but also to guide the formation of educational policies.

The Dunham County Parents against Push-out Program (DCP3) formulated the Parent Empowerment Program (PEP) as a training and advocacy project for parents of children in Dunham County Schools. Each year, the parent members of PEP, which meets in Dunham County, develop projects to increase awareness in their community of the disparities in school discipline measures. The purpose of this study is to examine PEP's work during its first two years in existence.

Significance

In January of 2014, the Obama Administration became the first federal administration to issue guidance for schools on addressing disparities in school discipline. (See Appendix C for more information.) I participated in two webinars after the release and wondered what impact, if any, the guidance would have on school discipline practices. Given the fact that no new legal requirements are attached to the guidance, other than to comply with existing legislation that prohibits discrimination based on such

factors as race, national origin, gender, or disability, discipline reform advocates are cautiously optimistic (Nicole, 2013).

Still, the guidance is timely for this research study and long overdue for education leaders. As a high school teacher in an urban, low-income, predominately African American public school, I have listened to students tell me about their encounters with the juvenile justice system. I have taught students who have been arrested and some who are currently on probation. I have taught students whose (perceived) behavior would likely lead them to alternative school placements or even expulsion if not for the supportive environment of our small high school. Several of these students have a learning disability or some other academic challenges. I often think about ways to keep fewer of my students from coming into contact with the juvenile justice system, and I know that some of these ways have to do with how my students experience school.

Much of the literature on school discipline identifies schools as a place contributing to disproportionate rates of African Americans, Hispanics, and students with disabilities in the juvenile justice system (ACLU, 2008; Bell & Ridolfi, 2008; Fabelo et. al, 2011; Hirschfield, 2008; NAACP, 2005; Nicholson-Crotty, Birchmeier, & Valentine, 2009; Rios, 2011). The present study is important for school personnel who: (a) recognize that students of color and students with disabilities may be receiving consequences for behavior at rates that are disproportionate to their population in the student body; (b) are willing to look outside of their traditional approaches to meeting the (academic, social, emotional, and physical) needs of students in the school, thereby preventing most classroom disruptions from occurring; and (c) are open to partnering with parents and community organizations to design, implement, and support ongoing

efforts to create a supportive and nurturing school experience for all students. This study is also important for parents who want to see a change in their children's schools but may not be aware of the power they have to influence that change. This study is important for anyone who believes that far too many students of color and students with disabilities are getting pushed out of schools into a society that defines them as inferior at best, or into a criminal justice system that denies them the opportunity to fully develop and share their gifts and talents with the world.

This qualitative study will attend to the lack of empirical evidence addressing parent and community involvement and culturally sensitive approaches to school discipline. For one, it will show how parent members of an activist community organization worked together to raise awareness in the community about school discipline policies that disproportionately affect students of color and students with disabilities. This research study will make a unique contribution to the literature on parents involved in community organizations that focus on education reform as well as to the literature on culturally centered research (Tillman, 2002). Culturally centered research places the contextualized history of a group of people at the center of the study, thereby privileging their worldviews and their epistemologies (i.e. ways of knowing) throughout the research experience. My hope is that this research will illuminate and serve as a guide for how to use a praxis-oriented social justice methodology within a culturally centered research framework in an ethical manner. To be more precise, this thesis is grounded in an African-centered educational perspective. It will be one of few studies that specifically examines parent community groups that target school discipline reform, and does so from an African-centered research perspective.

Assumptions and Limitations

This study makes some assumptions about the school-to-prison pipeline from within the African-centered perspective. First, I derive the culturally centered methodology used in this study primarily from African-centered scholarship, particularly because most of my participants are African American. As I will discuss later, the paradigmatic pluralism of African-centered methodology allows for the centering of participants of any ethnicity as subjects (not objects) in the research, thereby making it appropriate for use with a diverse group of participants. My next assumption regarding the use of the African-centered perspective is that the African world includes all people of African ancestry no matter where they are in the world, or how long since they (or their ancestors) left the continent (Asante, 2001). This includes those who left the continent voluntarily during pre-Colombian journeys, forcibly during the periods of trans-Saharan and transatlantic enslavement, and those who later migrated during the 20th and 21st centuries for better economic, educational, and other opportunities (Davies & M'Bow, 2007). Depending on the scholar, Afrocentric, African-centered, Afrikan-centered, Africentric, and Africology may refer to the same or to slightly different but related perspectives. I use the term African-centered in a general sense to encompass Molefi Asante's conception of Afrocentricity as a "frame of reference wherein phenomena are viewed from the perspective of the African person" (Asante, 1991, p. 171) and to emphasize the centrality in the African American experience of the culture of Africa and not just "one's cultural Blackness" (Shockley, 2007, p. 105). In other words, Kmt Shockley notes a difference between African Americans viewing themselves as Africans who happen to live in the U.S. and those who view themselves as having a separate

African American (or Black) culture not intricately connected to the culture of Africa. An African-centered approach to scholarly work locates African people as the subjects at the center of interpretation, analysis, history, and the intellectual experience and not as objects on the margins (Asante, 1991; Harris, 2003). This understanding of African Americans as part of the African world pertains whether or not the people self-consciously identify with an African heritage. It is also worth noting that not all African American scholars or theorists share this perspective, nor do they openly acknowledge embracing a Euro-American perspective.

Second, this study assumes the reality of "the school-to-prison pipeline" as the combination of policies and practices, such as zero tolerance policies and OSS, that push children out of the classroom and into the juvenile justice and criminal justice systems (ACLU, 2008; NAACP, 2005). Very few studies have demonstrated empirically that the school-to-prison pipeline exists. At least one study has attempted to fill this gap by directly testing and finding that disproportionate rates of school discipline targeting African American students replicate in the juvenile justice system (Nicholson-Crotty, Birchmeier, & Valentine, 2009). Another study found that when schools suspend or expel students, the likelihood of those students being involved in the juvenile justice system the following year increases significantly (Fabelo et al., 2011). In spite of the small volume of empirical data, the existing literature makes a convincing argument that youth of color are more likely than White students to enter the juvenile justice system as a result of exclusionary discipline (Fabelo et al., 2011; Nicholson-Crotty, Birchmeier, & Valentine, 2009).

There are also limitations to this study. The focus of the study is less on the actual outcomes the parents achieve than on the ways in which this parent organization operated. Like previous studies of community organizing groups that focus on other aspects of education reform (Mediratta, Shah, & McAlister, 2009; Warren & Mapp, 2011), this study will not attempt to empirically establish causality between the Parent Empowerment Program's activities and any outcomes in their communities. However, the inquiry will attempt to examine possible connections among the group's actions, the outcomes among the participants, and the communities, and the structures that they hope to change. Additionally, the (social, political, historical) context of the Dunham County communities heavily influences the development and operation of PEP, as well as the outcomes of the institutions (e.g. schools) the group is working to transform. A number of factors will intersect at any given time, but this does not preclude the potential to draw insights from both the way the group in this study operates and the existing research on the impact of community organizations (Laing, 2009; Mediratta, Shah, & McAlister, 2009; Oakes & Rogers, 2006; O'Donnell & Karanja, 2000; Renée & McAlister, 2011; Warren & Mapp, 2011).

Another possible limitation is that the parent community group in this study focuses primarily on school-based reform; the group gives less attention to the outcomes of discipline policies that shape student experiences after they have been forced to leave their home school through suspension or expulsion. So this study does not include an examination of the parent group's attempts to reform alternative schools, juvenile court processes, juvenile detention centers, or probation policies.

Finally, the nature of the parent organization poses a number of limitations. Although the organization identifies itself as "grassroots," the director used selection criteria to determine which parents could participate. Further, especially during the first year of the organization, a number of parents left or stopped participating fully in the work. None of these parents responded to my invitation to participate in this study. The absence of their perspectives regarding what took place during those first two years makes it more difficult to understand the reasons why they left or reduced their level of participation. Thus, this study is about those who remained, and it tells the story about the organization's work from the perspectives of those who remained in the organization.

Theoretical Frameworks

The next section of this chapter addresses the theoretical framework that informs the culturally centered inquiry for this study followed by a discussion of relevant theoretical frameworks for community organizing and how power operates. The foundation for the theoretical perspective that informs the culturally centered methodological approach is African-centered ontology and epistemology. According to Michael Crotty (2006), the theoretical perspective is "our view of the human world and social life within that world" (p. 7). The theoretical perspective "is a way of looking at the world and making sense of it. It involves knowledge, therefore, and embodies a certain understanding of what is entailed in knowing, that is, *how we know what we know*" (p. 8). Our epistemology informs our theoretical perspective and comprises one part of our "philosophical stance" (Crotty, 2006, p. 7). Essentially, it informs our worldview. Ellen Swartz (2009) defines worldview as "the lens through which people

see and experience the world" (p. 1049). Culture, ontology, and epistemology shape people's worldviews.

A Theoretical Framework for Culturally Centered Inquiry

African-centered theory posits that inquiry into the experiences of African American people should be grounded within an African, as opposed to a European, worldview. Europe's Enlightenment period largely influenced the present-day worldview of dominant Western societies (Dance, 2002; Swartz, 2009). This worldview espouses: (a) duality, which suggests the ability to divide spirit from matter, mind from body, or subject from object; (b) alienation, or the separation from nature and separation between people because of limited resources; (c) hierarchy, or ranking people, ideas, and procedures; and (d) fragmentation or division of material and social worlds (Swartz, 2009, p. 1050). The ontological orientation of this worldview includes "individualism, differences, competition, independence, individual rights, survival of the fittest, and control over nature" (p. 1050). Epistemologies from this worldview rely on reason, logic, and scientific method. This worldview contrasts with an African worldview. Key elements of the African worldview are: (a) oneness or unity; (b) the sacredness of life; (c) shared good; and d) balance. The ontological orientation of this worldview embraces "collectivity, commonalities, cooperation, interdependence, collective responsibility, survival of the group, and harmony with nature" (p. 1049). In other words, within this worldview, epistemologies are relational.

Crotty (2006) suggests that epistemologies fall under one of three broad categories: objectivism, constructionism, or subjectivism. Shiping Tang (2011) pushes this conceptualization further, arguing that scholars need an understanding of 11

foundational paradigms in order to comprehend human society and history. Tang argues that "unless we first get these ontological and epistemological issues right, no amount of methodology can get us very far" (p. 215). Tang posits that differences in ontological positions are the most important divisions within social sciences.

Ontological assumptions in African traditions deal with five categories: person, time, phenomenon, concepts, and healing (Martin, 2008). For the purposes of this study, I focus on one category, the person, which is at the center of the world and is the "fullest expression of creation" (Martin, 2008, p. 211). Multiple parts comprise a person, and these parts "are synchronized between the physical and metaphysical bodies" (p. 211). Different African cultural groups label these parts of the person in different ways, but in effect, they comprise the physical body as well as metaphysical aspects such as the soul, spirit, intellect, and moral character (Martin, 2008).

This concept of the person has epistemological consequences. By viewing the person as a composite of features that is connected to the universe, rather than as an individual, the African conception of person bridges the paradigms of individualism and collectivism. Epistemologically, by understanding the individual person, we can understand human society. Yet, the person in the African worldview is not an isolated entity; the person is connected to the universe and therefore cannot be understood without an understanding of the properties of the collective, which includes group identities, structure, culture, and norms (Tang, 2011). Tang (2011) insists, "collectivism thus explicitly rejects the reductionist position of reducing collectives to the mere sum of individuals within collectives" (p. 222). For this reason, a full understanding of any individual perspective cannot happen without an understanding of the group as a whole,

including the social, cultural, and historical context of the group. For this research study, a full understanding of the experiences of any one participant cannot happen without an understanding of the community organization as a whole.

A few words about culture.

A common concern when using the term "African" to refer to a cultural group is the variation that exists among the nations on the continent, as well as the influences of European colonialism. Didier Kaphagawani and Jeanette Malherbe (1998) identify two main camps of thought—modernists and traditionalists with respect to understanding African culture. Modernists do not uphold a distinctly African culture, claiming that the influence of colonization and globalization have altered the indigenous cultures of Africa's people. Traditionalists identify a unique African culture as that which was on the continent before colonialism and which many different national/ethnic groups share. Although there were numerous cultural groups on the continent prior to the arrival of explorers, enslavers, and colonizers from many nations of Europe, scholars hold that the differences among these groups were minimal and did not outweigh the commonalities (Diop, 1989; Kershaw, 1992; Nobles, 2006). Additionally, as noted above, African-centered scholars hold that people of African ancestry throughout the African Diaspora continue to have a connection to African ways of being (Hilliard, 1992; Kershaw, 1992; Lee, 1994; Nobles, 2006). The experiences of Africans in America have contributed to certain cultural patterns and retentions in language, religion, music, art, cuisine, and other aspects of life that many African Americans share (Hale, 1986; Holloway, 2005; Walker, 2001). Centering this inquiry in the African cultural heritage of African Americans, therefore, is appropriate for my African American participants. Using the African-

centered paradigm as a model for centering my non-African descent participants in their cultural worldview is also appropriate and permissible for reasons I explain in sections to follow.

African-centered epistemology.

R. Sentwali Bakari (1997) describes African-centered epistemology as "a modern way of knowing based on ancient African experience" (n.p.). Bakari discusses the evidence for an African epistemology based on ancient scripts from Egypt, Nubia, Ethiopia, Liberia, and Cameroon. Scholars have given the greatest emphasis to Egyptian scripts because so many achievements have come from Egypt. African ways of knowing have continued through the years of slavery and oppression that Africa's descendants have experienced, although most African Americans are unaware of the connection between their current behaviors and the historical context for those behaviors (Bakari, 1997). According to Bakari, "Afrocentric epistemology is rooted in spirituality, communalism, cooperation, ethics, and morality" (n.p.) but he notes that knowing through logic, reason, and science is also critical to demonstrating the intellectual capacity of African people.

African-centered epistemology verifies knowledge claims through a combination of historical understanding and intuition (Harris, 2003; Kershaw, 1992). African-centered epistemology assumes transcendent order in the world and verifies knowledge claims through immersion, not distance. Finally, liberation is a key component of African-centered epistemology because of its potential to free African people from mental bondage (Bakari, 1997; Harris, 2003; Kershaw, 1992; Mazama, 2001; Schreiber,

2000) and from any other type of oppression that keeps people of African descent from full economic, social, or political participation in society (Wilson, 2011).

Attention to an African-centered epistemology is necessary for several reasons. For one, the individual and collective knowledge of a group should be at the center of inquiry (Tillman, 2002). Linda Tillman (2002) raises a concern about whether or not researchers can "accurately interpret and validate the experiences of African Americans" without cultural knowledge (p. 4). Culturally specific knowledge relies on the experiences of African Americans and requires that researchers assess their knowledge of the participants in their research.

African-centered epistemology is also necessary because a Eurocentric approach is neither useful nor valid for people who do not hold a European worldview (Schreiber, 2000). The assumption here is that in spite of living in a Western society, many African Americans operate from a perspective that differs from a dominant, Eurocentric perspective of the world. Intelligence quotient (IQ) tests and other forms of academic assessment exclude African-based ways of knowing (Kwate, 2001; Shockley, 2007). European contexts lack concepts of spirituality and emotion, placing greater emphasis on abstractions.

African-centered theoretical perspective.

An African-centered theoretical perspective follows logically from an African-centered epistemology. According to Lisa Schreiber (2000), African-centered research "is concerned foremost that African ideals, values, and history must take the center of any analysis of African Americans or Africans" (p. 652). The tenets of African-centered theory are cultural centeredness, paradigmatic pluralism, and liberation and cultural

agency (Schreiber 2000). Cultural centeredness refers to placing the culture of the group participating in a study at the center of inquiry. Schreiber (2000) states that the "epistemology and methodology emerge from the worldview of the culture in focus rather than from the worldview of the researcher or the academy" (p. 655). In her discussion of paradigmatic pluralism, Schreiber refers to Asante's perspective that all cultural groups should be allowed to center themselves in their research. The African-centered paradigm is just one of many worldviews and by employing multiple paradigms in research, we gain a broader and more accurate understanding of the human experience. Liberation and cultural agency are related. Schreiber discusses three broad levels on which African-centered scholarship seeks liberation for people of African descent: historical, social, and epistemological and methodological. African-centered research is important not just for intellectual progress but also because of an expectation that social progress will result.

Schreiber (2000) discusses the African-centered approach as one paradigm, but Asante (1990) expands on this and states that there are three paradigmatic approaches to African-centered research: functional, categoral, and etymological. Within the functional category, scholars investigate needs, policy, and action. Schemes, gender, class, themes, and files fall within the categoral paradigm. The etymological paradigm addresses language. The paradigm for this research study is functional because I am looking at the needs of African American parents and students, how discipline policies affect their children's lives, and the actions that parents are taking to reform these policies.

Critiques.

Like all methodologies, the African-centered approach has its share of critiques. Schreiber (2000) summarizes the critiques that regard African-centered thought as essentialist, heterosexist, male-centered, and intellectually underpowered. Regarding essentialism, Perry Hall (1991) adds that African-centered scholarship is "insufficient as a theoretical base from which to address the complete set of issues facing Black Studies scholars" (p. 234). Hall argues that the African-centered perspective is too narrow and fails to account for interactions with Western economic, cultural, and political structures. Although it would be naïve to believe that one could dismiss the impact of the Western world on African American people, this does not preclude researchers from recognizing those qualities that distinguish African Americans who have been socialized within the culture from other racial-ethnic groups.

In response to the critique that African-centered scholarship is heterosexist and male-centered, Asante (1990) states that scholars must attend to the contributions of women and the roles that they have played in "liberating Africans and others from oppression [and] resisting the imposition of sexist repression and subjugation" (p. 10). The essence of African-centered research is liberation. Heterosexism and male-centeredness stand in opposition to a liberating paradigm.

The concern that African-centered thought is intellectually underpowered (Schreiber, 2000) likely stems from a concern that scholars have approached it in various ways. This is true of aspects of many disciplines, however, and points more to a need for scholars to clearly define how they approach their work.

In spite of these critiques, research that is situated within an African-centered epistemology and theoretical orientation has a great deal of promise. An African-centered research paradigm serves as an alternative to existing, Eurocentric paradigms that have marginalized the lived experiences of African Americans (Asante, 1990; Bakari, 1997; Harris, 2003; Kershaw, 1992; Mazama, 2001; Schreiber, 2000). It also contrasts with European philosophies that historically have regarded African ways of knowing as useless at best (Abdi, 2008; Kwate, 2001). African-centered methodologies (and other culturally relevant methodologies) "can lead to the development of theories and practices that are intended to address the culturally specific circumstances of the lives of African Americans" (Tillman, 2002, p. 6). In addition to utilizing an African-centered theoretical framework for understanding the parents as cultural beings and as subjects in this study, this research draws on frameworks for community organizing in education.

The remainder of this chapter presents theoretical frameworks for community organizing, including organizations with a focus on African and African American culture and a description of how power operates. These frameworks are important for understanding how community organizations operate in general to reform education and how organizing with a focus on African and African American culture differs from other models of organizing. Further, understanding how power operates is key to understanding how organizations are able to create change in their communities.

Theoretical Frameworks for Community Organizing

Two complementary theories of action that frame recent studies of how community organizing works to reform education are useful to situate this inquiry theoretically. The first is a linear model developed by researchers Kavitha Mediratta,

Seema Shah, and Sara McAlister. In *Community Organizing for Stronger Schools*, Mediratta, Shah, and McAlister (2009) propose a linear model to theorize action in community groups, which they based on their longitudinal, mixed methods study on the impact of community organizing. Their analysis begins with the "organizational inputs" phase, when organizations recruit stakeholders—community residents, parents, and youth—to develop relationships, define problems, and identify solutions. During the next phase, "community organizing campaigns", the authors observe that the organization's members develop their skills. This leads the members of the organization to begin to see outcomes in the community capacity as well as the district and school capacity. According to Mediratta, Shah, and McAlister (2009), changes in community capacity include enhanced leadership skills, community and political engagement, and increased knowledge about schools. Changes in the capacity of the district and the school include the district context, school climate, professional culture, and how instruction takes place in the classroom. These changes in the community, district, and school capacities work to produce impacts in the final phase: improved student outcomes. Mediratta, Shah, and McAlister acknowledge that their theory of action is simple and linear and does not fully encapsulate the circuitous, complicated work of organizing.

More recently, in *A Match on Dry Grass,* Mark Warren and Karen Mapp (2011) examined the process of community organizing through six case studies of community organizations. They also draw from the research literature on how community organizations operate to develop a theoretical framework for how organizing works specifically for education reform. Warren and Mapp define community as "a group of interconnected people who share a common history, a set of values, and a sense of

belonging" (p. 20). Using the metaphor of a tree, they explain that at the root of community organizing are shared histories and identities and organizing traditions. Just as opportunities and constraints in the environment will determine how a tree grows, they also determine how an organization develops. Specifically, the social and political history of a given context will cause a group to develop differently from a similar group in a different context.

Two of the core processes to organizing are building relationships and building power (Warren & Mapp, 2011). In the tree metaphor, these processes are in the trunk. By building relationships, organizations are able to build social capital, the "resources inherent in the relationships between people that help them achieve collective aims" (Warren & Mapp, 2011, p. 24). This social capital becomes power for organizing groups, which they can then leverage in their interactions with public institutions to solve social problems (Warren & Mapp, 2011).

The work that community organizations do is for a purpose: to transform individuals, the community, and institutions. In the metaphor of the tree, this transformation is in the branches and leaves. At the individual level, community organizations develop leaders. On the community level, organizing groups inspire people to act. As individuals mobilize and organize communities, and as communities organize and become involved in the work of education reform, institutions involved in public education begin to change. These institutions change because the balance of power changes, leading to more opportunities for communities and institutions to work together to improve education.

Theoretical Frameworks for Culturally Centered African American Organizing

Both of these theoretical frameworks illustrate how education reform community groups operate in general, but neither adequately attends to the importance of culture in organizing work. A group's cultural heritage informs the shared histories and identities that lay the foundation of organizing work. Culture also informs a group's value system. Culture determines, ultimately, how effective a group will be in meeting its stated objectives (O'Donnell & Karanja, 2000, p. 78). Sandra O'Donnell and Sokoni Karanja (2000) found with their community organizing work in Chicago (which addressed multiple community issues, not just education reform), a failure to draw on the strengths of the indigenous culture makes it difficult to sustain resident participation. They propose that in order to effectively work in African American communities, they must center the African cultural heritage of that community in its work. They also propose a model that advocates for institution building, which is mostly absent from existing organizing literature (O'Donnell & Karanja, 2000). This allows indigenous community members to develop economically without reliance on outside organizations with wavering commitments. Further, because they work in low-income communities, O'Donnell and Karanja argue for strategies to build the capital base in the community. There should be an overall purpose to the work, which includes deepening resident participation and developing participants to become leaders who define community problems for themselves. Finally, and most importantly, they share both of the aforementioned models' focus on transformation. For O'Donnell and Karanja, transformation refers to "the process by which people come to understand their own

internal spirit and strength in order to develop alternative visions of themselves and of their community" (p. 75). Further,

> Transformative community practice seeks to change: (1) how individual people in the community see themselves, developing deeper understanding of who they are and what they can accomplish; (2) how they see themselves in relationship with others in the community, building a collective identity and senses of common purpose and efficacy; and (3) how people outside the community view the community and its people. (p. 76)

Like Warren and Mapp's (2011) framework, O'Donnell and Karanja's framework recognizes that transformation occurs with the people involved in the organizing work as well as with the communities and larger institutions. Notably, this transformation includes the building of a collective identity with others in the community.

A second framework for organizing in African American communities comes from Bonnie Laing's (2009) work with members of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and the Black Panther Party (BPP). Within each organization, Laing analyzed the social philosophy, view of power, goals, methods of mobilizing, change strategies, and the organizing theory. From this she developed a culture-based framework to describe how African Americans organize in social movements. This framework includes: a broad definition of community, which encompasses Africans throughout the Diaspora in addition to African Americans within their local communities; "a broad definition of the scope of community problems"; an emphasis on the use of oratory traditions to raise people's consciousness of a problem; "a focus on deconstructing White supremacy and

internalized racism"; and "the use of change initiatives that challenge the validity of the existing social structures and the resultant power relationships" (p. 647).

Conceptions of Power

Community organizations use the collective power of parents, youth, community members, and institutions to challenge the existing power relationships that have led to inequalities in schools (Mediratta, Shah, & McAlister, 2009; Renée & McAlister, 2011; Warren & Mapp, 2011). Therefore, an understanding of how power works should prove helpful in understanding the work of community organizations.

There are multiple ways to conceive how power operates. According to Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre (2000), the humanist perspective suggests that all people have agency, and this agency gives people the power to act. Because agency produces power, all people can possess power. Not only can people possess power, but people can share it, give it away, and take it back again.

Michel Foucault (1984/1994) offers another way to understand power. According to Foucault, neither people, structures, nor institutions can possess power; power is relational (Foucault 1984/1994). In fact, Foucault shared that he generally does not use the term power except when he is discussing it in terms of power relations. One level of Foucault's power analysis is strategic relations. Foucault does not explicitly define strategic relations, but he uses the term interchangeably with strategic game (Foucault, 1982/1994, p. 170). Foucault states, "when I say 'game,' I mean a set of rules by which truth is produced" (Foucault, 1984/1994, p. 297). Strategic power relations produce a reality, a truth by which people continue to interact. Foucault insists, "what characterizes power is the fact that it is a strategic relation which has been stabilized through

institutions" (Foucault, 1982/1994, p. 169). At times, within these strategic relations, some try to control the behavior of others who are in that relation. This may lead to a counter attempt to control behavior, or an act of resistance toward the attempt to control (Foucault 1984/1994).

According to Foucault, people communicate power through their practices and interactions with each other (Digeser, 1992). Additionally, individuals continually exist in relations of power because they continually exist in discourses, which produce knowledge (Gannon & Davies, 2007). That knowledge helps individuals focus power toward specific goals and intentions (Digeser, 1992). Those goals and intentions thereby inform discourses, creating a circuitous relationship with knowledge and power (Digeser, 1992). Removing the authority figure does not remove the presence of power, because we continually exist in relations of power. Moreover, individuals cannot escape power relations because "subjects [of power relations] are social constructions, whose formation can be historically described" (Digeser, 1992, p. 980). Thus, the actions that individual subjects take in the exercise of power are not theirs alone, but result from the accumulation of the discourses and social influences that constructed the kind of subject that would take those actions.

Foucault's analysis captures the general nature of relations between people and organizations, but fails to account for the influence of race or culture. Amos Wilson's (2011) discussion of power considers the relationship between dominant and marginalized groups throughout the world, with a particular focus on White and Black people throughout the African Diaspora. His typology of power includes the following categories: force, coercion, influence, and competent and legitimate authority. In each of

these types of power, Wilson discusses how White people have convinced Black people of their subordinate position. For instance, Europeans no longer use force as power in the U.S. or former African or Caribbean colonies. Force is an inefficient display of power because it is economically and socially costly, and it incites resistance on the part of those who are subjected to it. Instead of using force, Europeans now use "more subtle and efficient means of political control" (p. 10). Yet the power relation between White and Black people has not changed. White people still retain the ability to act with force, even if they choose not to at the present time. Black people still lack the ability to combat this force, and until they do, will never be free from European domination.

Also under the category of force is psychic violence or psychic force. In his discussion of psychic violence, Wilson argues, "The ultimate force in the world is the force of mind. When that force is defeated all is lost" (p. 11). Wilson continues:

> Dominant Whites have used words and symbols to violently and unrelentingly attack oppressed Blacks in a thousand and one nefarious ways, including the projection of dehumanizing stereotypes and caricatures of them; the falsification of their history and culture; the miseducation of Blacks; and the engaging in chronic derisive media attacks on their morals, behavior, intelligence, ways of life, sexuality, physical features, motives and values. (p. 11-12)

That Wilson refers to this as power by force is significant because it suggests that it incites resistance among Black people, but Black people lack the ability to resist effectively. Black people lack control over those institutions that project dehumanizing stereotypes and Blacks have not effectively combatted the falsification of history and culture, nor their miseducation in schools. (Consider, for example, the way Jewish

people are able to project their history of the Jewish holocaust in film, school, curricula, etc.). Black people do not control the media outlets that perpetuate these images, and without this control, will likely never be free of the psychic force that Wilson discusses. Yet, Wilson also suggests the possibility for the Black community to neutralize White people's power if Black people do not allow themselves to be "psyched out" (p. 13). In his discussion of coercion as power, Wilson states that, sometimes, subordinate groups are coerced to falsely believe that dominant groups have more power than they do. "The often anemic self-concept of subordinate persons and groups, their low self-esteem, their ignorance of their actual strengths, are more the causes of their subordination than is the actual strength of their oppressors" (p. 13). Although coercive power is more efficient than force, it still can be costly and incite resistance. Wilson defines coercive power as "The instrumental use of force or the threatened use of force by the power holder to attain the compliance of another" (p. 12). In order to maintain coercive power, dominant groups must constantly survey subordinate groups. They must remain "fully informed as to the thoughts, attitudes and activities of its subjects" (p. 14).

Wilson argues that White people no longer have to rely on force or even coercion to a large extent. Instead, White people dominate Black people through influence. According to Wilson, "Influence occurs when a person acts in compliance with the wishes or directions or suggestions of another, based on his sheer positive regard for love and admiration of the other, or based on a desire to please or serve the other because of the other's personal significance to him" (p. 15). Four types of influence are rational persuasion, personal persuasion, expertise (or competent authority, discussed below), and propagandistic persuasion. Wilson states that the Black community has accepted

"Eurocentric frames of reference and perceptions of reality" instead of African centered frames (p. 16). White people influence Black people to behave in ways that support White dominance and inhibit the development of power within the Black community.

Wilson discusses competent authority as a separate type of power although he lists it as a type of influence. "*Competent authority* involves the achievement and exercise of social power derived from knowledge and skill where behavioral compliance is obtained from the subject in return for his receipt of some benefit or service awarded by the authority" (p. 16). Those in power may use competent authority deceptively, pretending to act in the best interest of the public but instead simply reinforcing the belief that they have the right to be in power.

According to Wilson, in general, marginalized groups tend to view power as something negative because their oppressors have used power against them. Thus, marginalized groups perceive the pursuit of power as something unholy, against God, lacking in virtue. Wilson argues that many Black people believe that power "is divinely deeded to dominant Whites" (p. 7). Much of Wilson's analysis of power positions White people as the ones who traditionally have been in power, with Black people as the ones who have had to fight for power, if they choose to fight at all. Wilson recognizes that this power is attainable for Black people, but not yet fully realized. Yet, throughout history, many Black people have demonstrated that they too have power. It may differ from the power that White people possess, and may go unrecognized by the mainstream discourse about power, but the power within Black communities has always been present.

Researchers identify social capital and political capital as two types of power that community organizations use to create change (Mediratta, Shah, & McAlister, 2009;

Renee & McAlister, 2011; Warren & Mapp, 2011). Social capital refers to the influence or power that results from forming relationships with others (Mediratta, Shah, & McAlister; Warren & Mapp, 2011). In essence, the more connections an organization has, the more influence it has in a community. Mediratta, Shah, & McAlister (2009) insist that social capital is insufficient to create change because most communities already have social capital. Organizations need to build political capital, or power, which is the democratic control over economic and cultural resources. Historically, the Black community has attempted to gain political power through voting rights, electoral votes and representation in Congress, and by electing Black people to office (Brown-Nagin, 2011; Clark, 1986; Harris, 2001). Nevertheless, Wilson (2011) argues that without economic power, African Americans cannot wield enough power to change their condition, no matter how many elected offices they hold.

Relatedly, social capital is insufficient to effect change in a society that is marred by institutionalized racism. Given Wilson's insistence that African Americans have to combat psychic violence, including "dehumanizing stereotypes," "the falsification of their history and culture," and their miseducation, there appears to be a need for foundational work in restoring African Americans' identification with their heritage and the privileging of African American culture among community organizers. African Americans will be unable to create change if they believe that the dominant group has more power than they do. Further, they may advocate for changes that do not privilege the needs of their particular communities in accordance with their culture, or they may accept compromises from dominant groups that do not work in their best interest (i.e. as a result of deception by seemingly "competent authorities"). O'Donnell and Karanja's

(2000) African-centered organizing framework and Laing's (2009) model for culture-based organizing mirror Wilson's insistence on rejecting Eurocentric frames of reality. Given the importance of funding in sustaining any organization, O'Donnell and Karanja (2000) also concur with Wilson's imperative that organizations build economically viable institutions. Laing's model includes "a focus on deconstructing White supremacy and internalized racism" and "the use of change initiatives that challenge the validity of the existing social structures and the resultant power relationships" (p. 647). Taken together, building power in African American communities requires more than building social capital. It requires the ability to build political capital, including democratic control over cultural and economic resources; institution building; deconstructing White supremacy and rejection of Eurocentric frames of reference; and restorative work in identification with African American culture.

Summary

Each of these theoretical frameworks contributes to an understanding of how the Parent Empowerment Program operated to raise parents' awareness about school discipline reform, and parents' involvement in culturally sensitive approaches to reducing disparities in school discipline. This study refines these theoretical frameworks by showing how the culturally centered frameworks overlap with and help to clarify the more general frameworks for organizing. In the chapters to follow, I review relevant literature on the educational practices contributing to disparities in school discipline. I detail the culturally centered methodology that I used for this work. I present findings to answer each of my research questions, including details on how the community organization in this study operated. In the final analysis section, I detail a culturally

centered framework that best models the way that the organization in this study worked to raise awareness about school discipline reform.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The school-to-prison pipeline refers to the combination of policies and practices, such as zero tolerance policies and out-of-school suspension (OSS), that push children out of the classroom and into the juvenile justice and criminal justice systems (ACLU, 2008; NAACP, 2005). According to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) Legal Defense Fund (2005), "the School-to-Prison Pipeline is one of the most urgent challenges in education today" (p. 2). In this chapter I discuss selected research that addresses why children of color and children with disabilities are more likely to be the targets of exclusionary discipline, which includes any consequence that removes the student from the classroom, such as in-school suspension, out of school suspension, or expulsion. In fact, at the intersection of race, disability, and gender are the highest rates of exclusionary discipline—African American males in special education (Fabelo, Thompson, Plotkin, Carmichael, Marchbanks, & Booth, 2011; Losen & Martinez, 2013). This body of research examines structural issues in the larger society, such as the criminalization of African American and Hispanic males as well as school-related factors such as zero-tolerance policies and a lack of awareness among faculty on how to manage discipline and support students' growth and development effectively. I present literature describing some research-based alternatives to exclusionary discipline. I then turn to a discussion of how past and present organizing efforts have worked to reform social policies. I discuss the recent increase in parent involvement in community organizations to reform education. The approach to involvement differs from prevailing notions of parent and community involvement, which typically support school-defined

purposes, such as volunteering for bake sales or field trips (Lawson, 2003; Robinson, 1997; Warren, Hong, Rubin, & Uy, 2009). I conclude with a summary of how this study yields new insights about community organizing for education reform.

Purposes of Education

The challenge for public schools to educate African American and Hispanic children likely stems from the fact that public schools were not created with them in mind (Blanchett, 2014). In 1779, Thomas Jefferson introduced the idea for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge bill, which would provide three years of free schooling for all non-enslaved children. The goal was to provide instruction in core academic subjects (reading, writing, arithmetic) and Greek, Roman, English, and U.S. history (Spring, 2000). Those who showed the most promise would be able to receive a free grammar school education and potentially even more years of schooling at the public's expense (Blanchett, 2014; Spring, 2000). Horace Mann, the "father of public education" in the U.S., designed the first common, or public school to assimilate and socialize children (mostly European immigrants) and develop a common value system among children, thereby reducing schisms in the larger society and supporting maintenance of political order (Blanchett, 2014; Spring, 2000). Joel Spring (2000) argues that Mann's purpose differed from Jefferson's in that Mann sought to remedy social ills through education whereas Jefferson believed that people could become good citizens without schooling. Later, the purpose of schooling shifted to identifying the most talented children for high school and college and developing the remaining obedient, hard-working children who could work in factories (Blanchett, 2014; Boggs, 1970/2011; Spring, 2000). Separating children in this way worked until the 1950s and 1960s when automated devices replaced

skilled labor. Children, who were no longer needed on the farm, at home, or in the factory, became "visible" and had to abide by compulsory education laws mandating that they attend school at least until age 16 (Boggs, 1970/2011). By 1960, schools transformed into a "mass detention home" (Boggs, 1970/2011, n.p.).

Overall, Spring (2000) summarizes the historical purposes of education as political (to educate citizens and develop future political leaders); social (to fill in the gaps in the family and religion to teach social and moral values); and economical (to increase economic growth and reduce wealth disparities). Spring notes, however, that Mann's common school was never common to all and there has never been a consensus about what schools should teach. Grace Boggs (1970/2011) warns that continuing to run schools in accordance with myths about the purpose of schooling, namely that schools are to help students "increase earning power," that their achievement is measurable by test scores, and "that schools are the best and only place" for education (n.p.), would only escalate the already burgeoning rebellion in secondary schools. Further, Boggs argues that any educators who continue to operate schools in this way "will find themselves increasingly resorting to force and violence and/or drugs like Ritalin to keep youth quiet in school and/or to keep so-called troublemakers and trouble out" (n.p.).

In order to address the needs of African American children, scholars have redefined the purposes of schooling for African American children, often drawing from the "original" purposes of education for African children in ancient Kemet (Egypt). In his review of Asa Hilliard's scholarship on this subject, Wade Nobles (2008) states that in Kemet, the goals of education were "unity of the person, unity of the tribe, and unity with nature; the development of social responsibility; the development of character; and

the development of spiritual power" (p. 731). The "fundamental purpose" was social and emphasized the responsibility to one's community and humanity in addition to learning skills, developing wisdom, and refining moral character. Nobles further argued, "education should directly result in each generation's having an inextricable link to its total past and an unbreakable responsibility for our infinite and collective future" (p. 734). In other words, children need to know and understand their history and how it informs the work that they need to do in the future. Knowledge of history informs a child's identity (Nobles, 2008). This understanding of history, or identity, is critical for African American children.

Many scholars see public education as an opportunity to undo the damage of cultural stripping that so many African Americans have endured. In his review of several scholars' approaches to African-centered education, Kmt Shockley (2007) determined that it was imperative that an African-centered education teach African American children their identity; to recognize that all people who descend from Africa are African; their cultural knowledge; to embrace African values (e.g. the Nguzo Saba); to commit to African nationalism; and to build and control community institutions (e.g. schools, stores, businesses). Shockley clarifies that this must occur in an environment that educates and not simply "schools" African American children. Joyce King (1994) adds that schools should teach African American children to identify collectively with people of African descent; to be responsible not just for their own education but for the education of their peers; to use their education for the benefit of their community, society, and humanity; to maintain their worldview even when it differs from that of the mainstream culture; and to analyze and understand the strengths and weaknesses of their community's culture. Their

education should be meaningful and rooted in their African culture. African American children's education should also teach them how to transform their communities and society.

What is common in the works of both Shockley and King and the works of several other scholars is the importance of African American children embracing an African identity, developing a sense of mutual responsibility for their communities, and acquiring the tools for social critique and transformation (Hale, 1986). Many African-centered educators advocate an interactive "circle of practice" that includes the student and the teacher, but also the family and the larger community (Akoto, 1994; Murrell, 2001; Rivers & Rivers, 2002). African-centered educators believe that parents must participate in the educational process along with the students (Rivers & Rivers, 2002). An effective African-centered educational environment will incorporate parents into the governance of the school, shaping the curriculum, and participating in assessment (Akoto, 1994; Murrell, 2001). It also places a responsibility on the school community, family, and outside community to reinforce cultural values and expectations, to provide guidance, and when necessary, give sanctions for poor behavioral decisions (Akoto, 1994). In short, the structure of the African-centered classroom is communal, and it supports the purposes of African-centered schools by reinforcing the collective African identity of the students and their families, supporting mutual responsibility for academic and character development, and encouraging social transformation to better communities and humanity.

Targets of School Discipline

African American and Hispanic students receive harsher discipline in schools than their peers from other racial groups (Fabelo et al., 2011; Losen & Martinez, 2013), and students with disabilities are more likely to receive a disciplinary consequence than their non-disabled peers (Fabelo et al., 2011; Losen & Martinez, 2013) with African American male students receiving some of the highest rates of exclusionary discipline. Ann Ferguson (2001) examined the reasons for this in *Bad Boys*, a critical study of how public schools shape the identities of African American male students and the ways in which those students resist. Ferguson states that her work is a study of two modes of reproducing racial inequalities, such as the inequalities that we see in school discipline today. These two modes are: (a) "how institutional norms and procedures in the field of education are used to maintain a racial order" and (b) "how images and racial myths frame how we see ourselves and others in a racial hierarchy" (p. 19). In *Punished*, an ethnographic study in an inner-city community, Victor Rios (2011) further illustrates the institutionalized norms that contribute to the criminalization of African American and Hispanic adolescent males. I wish to begin by contextualizing both of these studies in the long history of criminalization of Black males in this country.

The Criminalization of the Black Male

The institutionalized cultural model and norms that maintain racial order, that is to say the racial hierarchy in schools, have roots in the long history of racial prejudice, White supremacy racism and cultural bias in the U.S. (Muhammad, 2010). The disproportionate use of exclusionary discipline toward African American students stems from a perception that African American students are "dangerous" and from a desire by

school personnel (or rather a fear of their inability) to remain in control of student behavior (Fenning & Rose, 2007). Yet race "is a relatively poor predictor of student behavior" (Sheldon & Epstein, 2002, p. 8) because rates of misbehavior among African American students do not differ significantly from misbehavior among White students (Boyd, 2009; Nicholson-Crotty, Birchmeir, & Valentine, 2009; Skiba, Horner, Chung, Rausch, May, & Tobin, 2011). In spite of this, the perception that African American students are more problematic than other students remains. Desires to control Black people have a long history predating, and continuing long after the slavery era (Muhammad, 2010). After the emancipation of enslaved Africans, the loss of free labor, fears of southern White people, and the complicity of northern elites, led southern states to pass laws (Black Codes) that criminalized the behavior of Black people (Farrow, Lang, & Frank, 2005; Muhammad, 2010). Douglas Blackmon (2009) describes this in *Slavery by Another Name*:

> Instead of thousands of true thieves and thugs drawn into the system over decades, the records demonstrate the capture and imprisonment of thousands of random indigent citizens, almost always under the thinnest chimera of probable cause or judicial process. The total number of workers caught in this net had to have totaled more than a hundred thousand and perhaps more than twice that figure. Instead of evidence showing black crime waves, the original records of county jails indicated thousands of arrests for inconsequential charges or for violations of laws specifically written to intimidate blacks—changing employers without permission, vagrancy, riding freight cars without a ticket, engaging in sexual activity—or loud talk—with white women. Repeatedly, the timing and

> scale of surges in arrests appeared more attuned to rises and dips in the need for cheap labor than any demonstrable acts of crime. (p. 7)

Increased punishment of Black people had little to do with actual criminal behavior (Blackmon, 2009; Muhammad, 2010; Payne, 1995). Black people caught in this system were sometimes rented to plantation owners and companies in a practice described as convict leasing (Blackmon, 2009; Myers, 1998). This practice continued through the early 1900s.

Those caught in this new form of slavery included children and adults (Bell & Ridolfi, 2008). Yet images of African American youth were more criminal than childlike. Citing the work of Turner (1994), Ferguson (2001) describes these early images of African American children: "In the early decades of this century, representations of black children as pickaninnies depicted them as verminlike, voracious, dirty, grinning, animal-like savages" (p. 81-82). Ferguson states that these images continue to the present day, when media portrayals of African American children are often criminal, and discussions about Black males describe them as an endangered species, thereby identifying the African American male as a member of the animal kingdom.

Labeling students in these ways is rooted in the larger history of race and what race does in our culture (Wynter, 1992). Criminalization of these behaviors is a logical outcome within this cultural system. Rios (2011) defines criminalization as "the process by which styles and behaviors are rendered deviant and are treated with shame, exclusion, punishment, and incarceration" (p. xiv). The system of criminalization is

present everywhere, and comprises what Rios calls the youth control complex. Rios explains,

> The youth control complex is composed of material and symbolic criminalization. Material criminalization includes police harassment, exclusion from businesses and public recreation spaces, and the enforcement of zero-tolerance policies that lead to detention rooms, school suspensions, and incarceration. Symbolic criminalization includes the surveillance, profiling, stigma, and degrading interactions that young people regularly endure. (p. 40)

Rios found that for some of the young men in his study, criminal activity did not begin until after authorities (teachers, police officers) labeled the children as criminals (gang members, thugs). For instance, one of the students in the study, Tyrell, internalized a criminal nature after being treated like a criminal by many of the adults in his life. Growing up, Tyrell's father raised him to respect the police and authorities. Tyrell was tall for his age, and in his estimation looked like a grown man at the age of twelve. His teacher felt threatened by him and kicked him out of class, and police officers began to target him and check him for drugs. Although Tyrell was not selling drugs at the time, police still assumed that he was guilty. Tyrell felt that he had nothing to lose by selling drugs. He started selling marijuana a few months later. Rios writes "all the young men in this study believed that they were inherently criminal: their interactions with the world around them had led them to internalize a foreign concept, that criminality was part of their persona" (p. 52). As students become aware of society's rejection of them and internalize this rejection, they in turn "act out" against society by becoming involved in illegal activities (Dance, 2002).

Unfortunately, parents often become a part of this youth control complex as well. Frustrated and unsure of what to do about their children, some parents rely on the advice given by probation officers. This advice usually requires that parents participate as part of the youth control complex by using harsh discipline tactics that further criminalize their children (Rios, 2011).

The school-to-prison pipeline creates an image of a linear trajectory from school to jail, with stops at OSS, alternative schools, courts, and juvenile detention centers along the way (ACLU, 2008; NAACP, 2005). Although there is a progression from classroom misbehavior to involvement in the juvenile justice system, the forces that cause children to get drawn in and trapped in the pipeline are structural and complex. Paul Hirschfield (2008) offers a framework for criminalization that includes both "objective" and "subjective" structural conditions. His discussion of "objective" structural conditions examines political and economic conditions that contribute to deindustrialization, the lack of access to gainful employment, and mass incarceration. Specifically, deindustrialization resulted in a lack of employment for inner-city workers and fewer tax dollars for local schools. For instance, Pauline Lipman (2003) describes how Chicago has "diverted millions in taxes earmarked for schools, libraries and other public services to real estate interests" (p. 334). Deindustrialization also contributes to higher incidences of drugs, violence, and other crimes impacting both the inner city and their White, suburban neighbors (Hirschfield, 2008; Wilson, 1996/1997). Instead of reinvesting in troubled communities, however, politicians chose to focus on controlling behaviors through investment in crime control. The criminal justice system is politically and economically beneficial for rural communities that have jails to offer employment to the

community, and prisoners to increase any population-based benefits from the government. In short, changes in the political and economic conditions in the U.S. have "resituated inner-city schools (and 'lockdown' environments therein) structurally alongside the aggressive policing and imprisonment of disadvantaged Blacks and Latinos as a means to control and warehouse 'disposable' youth" (Hirschfield, 2008, p. 90).

For his discussion of "subjective" structural conditions, Hirschfield draws on the work of Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Hirschfield suggests that how school actors respond to student behavior "is mediated by individual interpretations of social reality" (p. 91). Two key areas of interpretation are the student's future prospects and the balance of power between teachers and students. School actors (teachers, administrators) respond to student (mis)behavior in ways that show a belief in students' future potential, or a belief that the student is a future prisoner. This is consistent with Fergusson's findings as well.

School-Related Policy Issues

Structural problems set the stage for contact with the juvenile and criminal justice systems, but for many children, the first step toward these encounters is at school (ACLU, 2008; Hirschfield, 2008; NAACP, 2005; Rios, 2011). A closer examination of school zero tolerance policies and a lack of awareness among school faculty reveal how easily African American and Hispanic children and children with disabilities can get caught in the school-to-prison pipeline.

History of Zero Tolerance

The prevailing U.S. ideologies of accountability and personal responsibility justify the sanctions that children receive, and fuel support for harsh policies to deal with

student misbehavior, particularly zero tolerance policies (Advancement Project, 2010). There is no single definition for zero tolerance, but the American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force (2008) defines zero tolerance as "a philosophy or policy that mandates the application of predetermined consequences, most often severe and punitive in nature, that are intended to be applied regardless of the gravity of behavior, mitigating circumstances, or situational context" (p. 852). According to Russell Skiba (2000), zero tolerance laws stem from the federal drug policies of the 1980s. In 1986, U.S. Attorney Peter Nuñez developed a zero tolerance policy, which impounded seagoing vessels carrying any amount of drugs. In 1988, U.S. Attorney General Edwin Meese expanded this punishment to anyone crossing the border with drugs. Customs officials were to seize vehicles and property of those bringing drugs into the country, and charge those individuals in federal court. Additional policies contributing heavily to the use of zero tolerance include: mandatory minimum sentencing laws for drug crimes; "three strikes" laws which require a mandatory incarceration after the conviction of three crimes; and the "broken windows theory" (Advancement Project, 2010). The broken windows theory states that when it appears that there are no community controls in a situation, and that no one cares, destruction will ensue (Kelling & Wilson, 1982). Law enforcement must deal with crime early and swiftly, before problems escalate.

Skiba's (2000) account of the history of zero tolerance, however, leaves out some important details about the Reagan Administration's war on drugs. According to Michelle Alexander (2012), Reagan declared a war on drugs in 1982, four years before Nuñez's zero tolerance policy. In 1985, the Reagan Administration's media campaign

developed public and legislative support for the war on drugs. "Almost overnight, the media was saturated with images of Black "crack whores," "crack dealers," and "crack babies"—images that seemed to confirm the worst negative racial stereotypes about impoverished inner-city residents" (Alexander, 2012, p. 5). From this perspective, some argue that the war on drugs and the subsequent zero tolerance policies were deliberate attacks on the African American community to justify their imprisonment.

Tough-on-crime approaches and fear of inner-city crime among Black youth also rose in the mid-1990s, sparked primarily by John Dilulio's (1995) work, "The Coming of the Super Predators." Dilulio predicted that in ten years, "today's at-risk 4- to 7-year old boys [will] become the next century's first crop of 14- to 17-year-old superpredators" (Dilulio, 1996, n.p.). These criminals, who mostly reside in Black inner-city neighborhoods, would "spill over into upscale central-city districts, inner-ring suburbs, and even the rural heartland" (Dilulio, 1995, n.p.). Dilulio insisted that moral poverty—the absence of loving, responsible adults to teach children right from wrong—was at the root of this problem. He advocated for an increase in churches to fill the moral gap for those who can still be saved, and to incarcerate those who are unsalvageable. Claiming, "No one in academia is a bigger fan of incarceration than I am," Dilulio stated, "In deference to public safety, we will have little choice but to pursue genuine tough law-enforcement strategies against the super-predators" (Dilulio, 1995, n.p.). In subsequent writings, Dilulio attempted to change the tone of his argument, focusing on partnerships with faith-based institutions to prevent the increase in crime that he predicted (Schiraldi, 2001). The myth of the super-predator had already spread, however, to multiple news reports in the U.S. and overseas (Templeton, 1998), and even to the introduction of a bill

in Congress titled the Violent Youth Predator Act of 1996 (Schiraldi, 2001). The bill would have made states eligible for additional funding if they agreed to treat 14-year-olds like adults for serious violent crimes, allowed the federal government to execute youth as young as age 16, and would have revised several other former protections for juveniles (Templeton, 1998; H.R. 3565, 1996). The bill ultimately died in committee (H.R. 3565, 1996) and scholars have debunked the myth of the superpredator, but as James Howell (2009) notes, the public took it seriously for several years.

The notion of zero tolerance spread to a wide array of areas as diverse as environmental issues and skateboarding (Skiba, 2000). Zero tolerance policies also began to emerge in schools. Student misbehaviors like pushing and shoving were reclassified with legal terms like "battery" and talking back became "disorderly conduct" (Nicole, 2013). In the early 1990s, educators were afraid of a perceived increase in violence in schools. As a response to this, schools throughout the country adopted zero tolerance policies for drugs, weapons, and in some cases smoking and school disruption. In 1994, the Clinton Administration signed the Gun-Free Schools Act, which requires a one-year expulsion of any student carrying a firearm. The law also requires the referral of students who violate laws into the criminal or juvenile justice system. Later amendments to the act have expanded the language to require sanctions for students carrying anything that can function as a weapon. Tougher laws on school weapons have led to students being suspended or even expelled for carrying items such as finger nail files or toy water guns. The Gun-Free Schools Act does allow for each school's chief administrative officer to review infractions on a case-by-case basis, although some local

interpretations of the act have given the impression that zero tolerance policies do not allow for such flexibility (Skiba, 2000).

The use of zero tolerance runs parallel with the accountability movement in education (Advancement Project, 2010). The push for zero tolerance stemmed from the War on Drugs in the 1980s, and the accountability movement emerged after the 1983 publication of *A Nation at Risk*. Both of these "get tough approaches" have their roots in similar ideology:

> The promoters and defenders of these policies have used the same, undeniably persuasive arguments grounded in principles of accountability and personal responsibility that many Americans associate with success in other fields, such as business. Indeed the driving ideology behind both high-stakes testing and zero tolerance comes right out of the corporate playbook, as it is based on the notion that problems are solved and productivity is improved through rigorous competition, uncompromising discipline, constant assessment, performance-inducing incentives, and the elimination of low performers. (Advancement Project, 2010, p. 4)

Students who are behavioral problems are more likely to have academic problems as well (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010). Thus, requiring that schools pursue success in accordance with a business model tempts administrators to push students with behavioral problems out of school through exclusionary disciplinary measures.

Zero Tolerance Policies

Zero tolerance policies have contributed to an increase in school surveillance and exclusionary discipline with disastrous consequences for children. Because of

institutionalized practices that contribute to racial hierarchies, and portrayals of African American and Hispanic children as criminals, school-based zero tolerance policies unduly impact African American and Hispanic children. Skiba's (2000) review of the literature on metal detectors, school locker searches, surveillance cameras, and school uniforms found that only the literature on school uniform requirements contributed to a calmer, less violent school environment. Anecdotal reports by schools suggest that these other policies have led to less violence, but at the time of his writing, there were no published evaluations to show that these measures were effective. More recently, the American Psychological Association (APA) Zero Tolerance Task Force (2008) examined the literature on zero tolerance policies over its 20-year history of implementation. It was found that school violence and disruption has been relatively stable, and may have even decreased, since 1985. In spite of declines in incidents of violence in schools, the 1999 school shooting tragedy at Columbine High School sparked an increased focus on zero tolerance policies (Advancement Project, 2010). The Columbine shooting; the 2012 shooting at an elementary school in Newtown, Connecticut; and in 2013, a second shooting in Colorado at Arapahoe High School, continue to fuel fears about school safety. Thus, the need for extreme measures to prevent violence stems from a misconception about the actual level of violence in schools as well as any consideration of the demographics of such violence (e.g. the race of the offenders).

There is much more conclusive evidence, however, about the impact of exclusionary discipline on students. Many misconceptions exist about exclusionary discipline. Removing students from schools through suspension and expulsion leads to less satisfactory school climates, school governance structures, and disproportionate

amount of time spent on disciplinary issues (APA, 2008). Students do not necessarily learn from the mistakes of others as these policies often intend; instead, students find exclusionary discipline unfair and ineffective.

Additionally, students receiving exclusionary discipline are more likely to have future behavior problems, drop out of school, and not graduate on time (APA, 2008). The emphasis on accountability in schools, however, has incentivized schools to "push out" certain students (Advancement Project, 2010; Fenning & Rose, 2007). Zero tolerance policies and other forms of school discipline are one of the "stops" along the path to incarceration (ACLU, 2008). Another that is relevant to this study is failing public schools, which results from a lack of awareness among school faculty of how to relate to and respond to African American and Hispanic students and students with disabilities.

Failing Public Schools

The next "stop" on the path to incarceration is really the first stop for most students: failing public schools (ACLU, 2008). This is the most significant stop and the factors contributing to schools' failure are more complex than what most of the policy, advocacy, and legal literature reflect. One important factor contributing to the disproportionate number of African Americans receiving exclusionary discipline is a misunderstanding of classroom behavioral norms. There is a cultural divide, or cultural "mismatch" between African American students and their teachers (Blanchett, 2014; Tefera, Thorius, & Artiles, 2014; Townsend, 2000). This cultural divide is a contributing factor in how teachers relate with and discipline students. Ironically, this cultural divide may also transcend race in some instances when class differences prevail.

The first source of this cultural divide concerns school-related factors. The lack of African American and Hispanic teachers leaves many children of color without role models. African American and Hispanic teachers are symbolic of the attainment of professional goals (Townsend, 2000). Although having a teacher of the same ethnicity does not preclude teacher-student misunderstandings, the shared ethnic background may help to alleviate some of the cultural conflicts that can lead to behavioral problems. Second, cultural conflicts between students and the school culture often lead to problems in the classroom (Ferguson, 2000; Kuykendall, 2004; Townsend, 2000). These conflicts can take many forms, such as a student's desire to multitask or work with another student instead of working silently and individually. Finally, language and communication differences between students and teachers can lead to problems. Students may unintentionally offend teachers when using nonstandard English, words with multiple meanings (e.g. fat versus "phat," where the latter has a positive connotation), speaking with a great deal of emotion or passion, or speaking at greater volume levels (Kuykendall, 2004; Townsend, 2000). From the student's perspective, these behaviors are normal parts of the home life, but at school these behaviors can result in a behavioral referral for disruption, or even a recommendation for special education (Blanchett, 2014).

Many scholars and educators have taken an interest in the specific learning needs of African American and Hispanic students (Hale, 1986, 2001; Hollins & Spencer, 1990; King, 1994; Kuykendall, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Nobles, 2006, 2008; Shade, 1994; Shockley, 2007). Several agree that African American children need a pedagogy that centers them in their history and culture (King, 1994; Nobles, 2008; Shockley, 2007). A number of scholars have demonstrated how African American children benefit from

culturally connected methods of educating them (Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Lee, 1994; Nobles, 2006, 2008). Wade Nobles (2008) advocates a pedagogy that incorporates "relationship(s), ritual, recitation, repetition, and rhythm" (p. 737). Relationship building is critical because students are more likely to behave in classrooms where they have a positive relationship with their teacher (Kuykendall, 2004; Townsend, 2000). A. Wade Boykin and Pedro Noguera found that teacher-student relationship quality (TSRQ) can close gaps in achievement. The features of TSRQ "include the degree to which teachers display empathy, support, encouragement, and optimism and to which they are perceived to be fair, genuine, and nonpatronizing in their praise and feedback" (p. 70). TSRQ and engagement mutually influence each other. Boykin and Noguera state that they have more evidence in their text to support TSRQ than any other factor that they reviewed, but they also state that Black and Hispanic children are more likely to be in classrooms with low levels of TSRQ. Na'ilah Nasir (2012) describes the importance of "identity building" work in classrooms. Some scholars emphasize the importance of placing education in the midst of the community and drawing on African and African American cultural practices (Shockley, 2007). Other scholars have discovered a need for African American children to learn holistically and even identify a culturally grounded learning style for African American children (Hale, 1986, 2001; Hollins & Spencer, 1990; Shade, 1994). In short, teachers need to go beyond an emphasis on classroom management and work to engage students academically in a way that is culturally affirming (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Kuykendall, 2004; Townsend, 2000).

Research on African American and Hispanic students often conflates their experiences and needs (Noguera & Hurtado, 2012). Although the experiences of African

American and Hispanic students share a number of similarities, including overrepresentation in special education and underrepresentation in talented and gifted academic programs, Hispanic students have unique educational challenges. For instance, Hispanic children are less likely to attend preschool than White or Black children (Torres & Fergus, 2012), leaving them without the benefit that early childhood education has proven to give children later in school. They are also more likely to attend schools that are segregated according to race and social class (Noguera & Hurtado, 2012). Further, many Hispanic students are undocumented. Undocumented students cannot receive federal aid to attend college and, knowing that the odds are against them for being able to participate fully in the U.S., they are less likely to persist in high school. Popular media portrayals of Hispanics perpetuate the notion of immigrants as criminals who are taking away jobs and resources from U.S. citizens (Diaz-Strong, Gómez, Luna-Duarte, & Meiners, 2012).

Relevant Teachers

Helping teachers to manage their classrooms and understand differences in students' learning styles and cultural norms are some of the most important steps toward reducing the rate of exclusionary discipline (Schwartz, 2001; Townsend, 2000). According to Wendy Schwartz (2001), when school personnel look at African American students as problem students, they may try to control them, avoid them, or project negative attitudes about them. Instead, school personnel should hold high expectations of all students, including African American students, and increase the number of African Americans on teaching staffs who have the knowledge and expertise to use students' cultural backgrounds constructively to scaffold their learning and development. An

ability to relate to the students' background makes a difference both academically and behaviorally. Donald Easton-Brooks (2014) determined that students who had teachers of the same ethnic background ("ethnic matching") had higher levels of academic achievement than those whose teachers were from a different background. Janelle Dance (2002) found that teachers who are caring, empathetic, and "down" (i.e., relate well to students) are more likely to get cooperation from students, while those who are uncaring and unempathetic (i.e., unable to relate to students), or caring but still unempathetic are less likely to get students to cooperate, and thereby more likely to have discipline problems. Importantly, Dance advocated for school personnel who were prone to "teach" more than "punish" students who misbehaved. Educators should help students understand the long-term consequences of misbehavior instead of only utilizing punitive measures.

Promising Practices

A school's approach to behavior management can prevent problems before they begin. Schwartz (2001) argues that schools need a written, widely circulated, and culturally sensitive code of conduct. School personnel should also contextualize behavior, realizing that "many African American students speak out loudly and interrupt as a way of showing their interest" (Schwartz, 2001, p. 4), behaviors that are likely to get children in trouble in the classroom. When students do need discipline, it should fit the infraction, and it should include restitution and an apology. The consequence should be student-centered and focus on modeling good behavior and positive, high expectations for the students' cultural group. There is evidence that Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), discussed in the next section, can prevent behavioral problems

before they begin. Restorative justice (RJ) offers an approach to resolving problems that do arise.

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports

One model for school-wide behavior management is Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS). PBIS is a framework for building a positive school climate. Traditional school discipline focuses on punishing undesirable behavior. In contrast, PBIS works to replace undesirable behavior with new behavior. PBIS originated in the 1980s as an implementation framework to manage behavior for students with behavioral disorders. The National Technical Assistance Center later shifted this focus to include all students. PBIS is now "a framework for enhancing the adoption and implementation of a continuum of evidence-based interventions to achieve academically and behaviorally important outcomes for all students" (Sugai & Simonsen, 2012, p. 2). George Sugai and Brandi Simonsen (2012) note that the practices involved with PBIS, however, are not new and have been in use since the early 1960s (Sugai & Simonsen, 2012). PBIS is the only behavioral plan mentioned specifically in the 1997 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Although the law does not mandate the use of PBIS, it does require that Individualized Education Plan (IEP)[4] teams consider its usage for any student who is unable to learn because of behavioral challenges, or who impacts the ability of others to learn (Positive Behavioral Supports and the law, n.d.). As a framework, PBIS emphasizes the process over any specific practice. Because of this, PBIS may look differently in different schools. What

[4] An IEP is a guide for how a school will deliver special education services to a child. See "What is an IEP?" (n.d.). National Center for Learning Disabilities. Retrieved December 27, 2013 from http://www.ncld.org/students-disabilities/iep-504-plan/what-is-iep

should be common to all implementations of PBIS, however, is a clear definition of desired student outcomes, the use of data to make decisions and solve problems, and supportive systems for the implementation of PBIS. These supportive systems include professional development for staff, monitoring of the program, and funding (Sugai & Simonsen, 2012).

PBIS emphasizes the use of culturally appropriate interventions, meaning that interventions should attend to the "unique and individualized learning histories" of students (Sugai et al., 2000). This includes all aspects of the child's history—"social, community, historical, familial, racial, [and] gender" (p. 134). Further, PBIS works best when the expectations at school are mirrored in the home.

The core principles of PBIS for a school-wide implementation include the following: (a) the belief that all children can learn to behave appropriately; (b) early intervention in problem behaviors; (c) differentiated behavior instruction according to student needs; (d) the use of research-based, scientifically validated interventions; (e) progress monitoring of student behavior to determine the effectiveness of an intervention; (f) data-based decision making; (g) assessments for office discipline referrals, behavioral problems by time of day, and progress monitoring (Primary Prevention, n.d.). Individual schools determine the behavioral outcomes that they wish to see in their schools. The school PBIS team then builds a matrix that lists all of the places where staff would monitor behavior—in the classroom, on the bus, in the hallway, in the cafeteria, etc. Then below each category, a list of expectations (stated positively) is given. For instance, in the hallway, an expectation to "be safe" may include instructions to keep hands and feet to oneself and walking on the right-hand side. The primary level of PBIS

focuses on preventing misbehavior throughout the school. The secondary level of PBIS incorporates strategies to address behavioral problems with a smaller number of students, or even a classroom or students, who demonstrate some level of difficulty adhering to expectations. The third level addresses problem behaviors on the individual student level.

A common misconception about PBIS is that it is a reward system, but it is much more than this. The central question of PBIS is "What about the interaction of the curriculum, instruction, learners and learning environment should be altered so that that the students will learn?" Schools that implement PBIS see lower rates of discipline referrals. Importantly, PBIS can reduce overall suspensions without reducing the inequities in those rates of suspension. For this reason, schools should be willing to take PBIS one step further and look at how to address the disproportionality.

Restorative Justice

Another promising program that contrasts with zero-tolerance policies is restorative justice. "Restorative justice is about restoring victims, restoring offenders, and restoring communities" (Braithwaite, 2002, p. 11). Although restorative justice may seem like a recent phenomenon, John Braithwaite (2002) recounts that since ancient times, most societies have utilized some form of restorative justice. Restorative practices are inherent to indigenous civilizations, but its modern-day practice likely results from work in Canada in the 1970s (Van Ness, Morris, & Maxwell, 2001). Juvenile offenders and their victims worked in tandem with judges to develop an appropriate sanction for the offender. Both the offender and the victim benefitted from this process—the offender was able to see the impact of his actions, and the victim was able to actively participate in

the proceedings, which does not typically happen in traditional court cases. Restorative justice is influential in many other nations, such as Australia, Canada, England, and New Zealand. It has gained some prominence in the U.S. as well, although it still competes with other methods for handling offenses (Van Ness et al., 2001).

In order to apply restorative justice effectively, one must attend to both the process and the values. The process requires that all stakeholders—the victim, the offender, and the impacted community—decide democratically how to resolve a conflict. The values include forgiveness and reconciliation (Braithwaite, 2002). Restorative justice requires that offenders see their actions as not just violations of a rule, but as an offense against a person and/or community. Thus, instead of simply punishing the offender for breaking a rule, all stakeholders come to an agreement about how to restore the offender to the community (Braithwaite, 2002).

Some of the types of restorative practices include victim-offender mediation (VOM), community justice conferencing (CJC), and peacemaking circles (Correctional Service Canada, 2012; Van Ness et al., 2001). With VOM, a mediator helps a victim and offender come to an understanding of each other's perspective and assists them with taking steps to reconcile. VOM supposedly originated with the 1974 "Elmira Case." A probation officer thought that the offenders should meet with the victims of teenage vandalism and pay restitution (Raye & Roberts, 2007). During VOM, the victim of an offense and the offender meet with a mediator to discuss how the offense impacted the victim and to develop a plan for the offender to address the harm done. CJC is similar but may be even more effective than VOM. During CJC, not only are the victim and offender present, but family members and supporters of the victim and offender are

present, along with social services and a coordinator. Peacemaking circles, which encompass healing circles, community circles, and sentencing circles, come out of Aboriginal traditions. These circles operate on the belief that crime impacts a community and the community should therefore be involved in resolving the problem (Correctional Service Canada, 2012; Van Ness et al., 2001). The use of narrative or storytelling is common in all restorative processes (Raye & Roberts, 2007).

The centrality of the community in resolving disputes as opposed to the state or another institution positions restorative justice as compatible with African and African American cultural values (Jenkins, 2006). Morris Jenkins (2006) determined that historically in the Gullah community in South Carolina, the residents used restorative practices to resolve disputes. Although the community has recently turned to using Western methods of dealing with offenses, the older residents are critical of them, referring to the Western methods as the "unjust law." The younger respondents on the island knew very little about the "just law," which is the restorative practice of their elders (Jenkins, 2006).

Studies indicate that the use of restorative justice in schools has reduced the number of disciplinary referrals. The International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP), a private, stand-alone graduate school dedicated to promoting the use of restorative practices, developed the SaferSanerSchools program. SaferSanerSchools is a two-year implementation program that contributed to significant declines in the number of incidents and discipline referrals in several schools in a short amount of time (Lewis, 2009; Mirsky, 2007). For instance, Palisades High School began implementing SaferSanerSchools in the 1998-1999 school year. By the 2001-2002 school year, the

number of disciplinary referrals dropped from 1,752 to 1,154. Palisades Middle School began implementing restorative practices in the fall of 2000. The school experienced a drop in referrals from 913 during the 2000-2001 school year to 516 referrals the following year (Mirsky, 2007).

The founder of IIRP insists that "There aren't enough bars, metal detectors, or police to make a school safe if there is a culture of violence in a school…You need to strike at the heart of the culture" (Adams, 2008, p. 34). Restorative justice promotes a culture of cooperation and connectedness, which makes children feel safe and valued. Restorative justice uses collaboration and collective responsibility to resolve conflicts and invites teachers to make decisions with students instead of only inflicting consequences on them. Arguably, the relationships that teachers build with their students positively influences student behavior (Adams, 2008).

Given the strategies that exist to support students without resorting to exclusionary disciplinary measures, the question arises: why are we not using these strategies? According to Mediratta, Shah, and McAlister (2009), the problems that exist in urban schools are not the result of a lack of knowledge, but rather they stem from an uneven distribution of power as a result of qualities such as race, class, gender, and ability. Community organizations seek to increase both social capital, which is power or influence that comes from having connections to others, and political capital, which is power or influence in the political realm, in an effort to pressure leaders to respond to their demands (Mediratta, Shah, & McAlister, 2009; Warren & Mapp, 2011). In this next section, I discuss how community organizing has done this in the past, beginning with one of the originators of modern community organizing, Saul Alinsky.

History of Community Organizing

The Alinsky Tradition

Saul Alinsky began organizing in Chicago in 1939 (Alinsky, 1971). He believed that radical, and sometimes even unethical means justified the ends when those ends were social justice for economically disadvantaged people. These radical means fueled much opposition from elites. The press attacked him, the Ku Klux Klan threatened his safety, and Oakland, California's city council banned him from coming to the city. In Alinsky's mind, however, attacks from the establishment only served to validate him to the disenfranchised. In fact, it is because of these attacks that low-income Black communities in Chicago and Rochester invited him to help them organize for jobs, housing, and education.

Alinsky was an advocate for participatory democracy, believing that only by restoring power to people could they live fulfilling lives. Alinsky described the power relationship between three groups of people: the "Haves," the "Have-Nots," and the "Have-a-Little, Want Mores." The Haves represent those with money and power. The Haves wish to maintain the status quo and everything that they do is in an effort to remain in power. Alinsky writes, "The Haves possess and in turn are possessed by power. Obsessed with the fear of losing power, their every move is dictated by the idea of keeping it. The way of life of the Haves is to keep what they have and wherever possible to shore up their defenses" (p. 147). Because the Have-Nots only have a limited amount of power, the Haves can only increase power if they take power from each other. Alinsky described this as "power cannibalism" (p. 149). The Haves will only make peace

with each other when they have to defend themselves against a common enemy, such as the Have-Nots.

The Have-Nots are "chained together by the common misery of poverty, rotten housing, disease, ignorance, political impotence, and despair" (p. 18). Unlike the Haves, they have little, if any, financial resources. Also unlike the Haves, their numbers are large. This is one of the advantages of the Have-Nots and when used effectively, can force the Haves to fulfill legal obligations to the Have-Nots. Alinsky cautioned that the morality of the Have-Nots changes when they become the Haves; they too will begin to work to keep the power that they have gained.

The Have-a-Little, Want Mores are the middle class. They are "social, economic, and political schizoids" (p. 19). They want to benefit from change, but they are not willing to risk what they have managed to attain. Yet this is the group that Alinsky believes is critical to successful organizing for action. The White middle class holds power because of their large numbers and resources. Even if all of the Have-Nots organized, they would not have the resources necessary to make significant social, economic, and political change.

Alinsky's depiction of the Haves, Have-Nots, and the Have-a-Little, Want Mores makes the important point that the Have-Nots can put pressure on the Haves to fulfill legal obligations. These legal obligations are the creation of the Haves (Alinsky, 1971). Seemingly, the Have-Nots can only demand that which the Haves have set in place. The Have-Nots do not make the rules, they do not formulate the policies, and they do not create the ideals. Thus, the Have-Nots do not escape the power relation with the Haves. Yet because of their large numbers and with their collective resources, the Have-Nots can

pressure the Haves to make changes. Additionally, Alinsky encouraged the Have-Nots to inflict material damage to the Haves if the end result is justice for the Have-Nots. From a humanist perspective (St. Pierre, 2000), one might argue that by organizing collectively, the Have-Nots increased the amount of power that they hold. From a Foucauldian perspective, neither side possessed power to begin with (Foucault, 1984/1994). Yet the Have-Nots can communicate power with the Haves through their numbers and their collective actions. It is because of these actions that Alinsky's followers realized victories.

Although Alinsky was by many definitions a radical, he was not irrational. He believed in working within the "system" and felt that people should be willing to compromise. Alinsky did not see organizing as a zero-sum game. He stated, "If you start with nothing, demand 100 per cent, then compromise for 30 per cent, you're 30 per cent ahead" (p. 59). The Alinsky tradition continues today through the work of the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), one of the largest national networks of grassroots organizing (Oakes & Rogers, 2006; Warren & Mapp, 2011). A second large national network is the Pacific Institute for Community Organization (PICO) (Oakes & Rogers, 2006). Both are faith-based alliances and work on a number of issues including health, housing, immigration reform, neighborhood revitalization, and education (Industrial Areas Foundation, n.d.; Oakes & Rogers, 2006; PICO National Network, n.d.).

The Alinsky tradition is a rational approach but it often narrowly emphasizes class-related issues (Oakes & Rogers, 2006). In contrast, the civil rights tradition sought to incite people morally and emotionally and to think critically about how to confront injustice. The modern civil rights movement began around the end of World War II and

lasted until the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. (Clark, 1986). The work of civil rights leaders cut across class lines in the African American community, focusing on solidarity and shared identity among members of the community. The African American community has a long history of organizing, a history that both predates and extends past the civil rights era.

African American Organizing Legacy

The NAACP.

African American organizing for social and racial justice has a long history that dates at least as far back as far as the colonial era. Before the modern civil rights movement began, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was a primary vehicle of protest for African American people (Clark, 1986; Morris, 1984). Founded in New York by highly educated White and Black people, the NAACP concentrated its efforts in the North for eight years before turning its attention to the South in 1917 (Morris, 1984). With the exception of W.E.B. DuBois, White people filled all of the original administrative leadership positions and Walter White headed the organization for many years. The NAACP used persuasion and litigation to accomplish its goals (Clark, 1986; Morris, 1984). It had a number of important legal victories, even before the *Brown vs. Board* decision, including the invalidation of the "grandfather clause" in 1915, which prevented the grandsons of enslaved Africans from voting, and the 1927 ruling against an all-White primary.

Of course, the Supreme Court ruling in favor of the NAACP did not necessarily translate into the realization of those victories on the ground. Southern Whites began to

strategically attack the operations of the NAACP in the South and succeeded in reducing the number of African American members.

> Some interpreters argue that this coordinated attack on the NAACP by white southern officials greatly contributed to the emergence of the modern civil rights movement, since it cleared the way for new mass movement organizations and encouraged Black people to use the tactics of direct confrontation rather than relying on the courts. (Clark, 1986, p. 40)

White hostility, the centralized, bureaucratic nature of the NAACP, and its focus on legal action prevented the NAACP from ever mobilizing a mass base in the Black community. Rarely has the NAACP's membership exceeded 2% of the Black population (Morris, 1984). The Black community has tended to look on the NAACP favorably because of their legal advocacy (Morris, 1984). Notably, the NAACP's work in the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* case is a significant victory for the organization.

The Black church.

The role of the Black church in community organizing is seldom given the attention that it deserves (Green-Powell, Hilton, & Joseph, 2011; Morris, 1984). According to Aldon Morris (1984), "the black church functioned as the institutional center of the modern civil rights movement" (p. 4). It continues to be one of the most dominant forces in the Black community today (Gaines, 2010; McCrary, Grant, & Beachum, 2010; Morris, 1984). The church gave Black people a sense of belonging, accomplishment, and ownership in a racist, hostile world. The Great Migration of Black people into northern (and western) cities led to the expansion of the urban Black church as a significant force in the Black community. By 1930, Black people comprised roughly

a third of the population in major cities like Atlanta, Birmingham, New Orleans, Charleston, and Memphis, but they owned more than half of the churches in many of those cities (Morris, 1984). The Black church was intricately connected to Black colleges and universities where many ministers received their training. The core values of the modern civil rights movement, such as "human dignity, personhood, manhood, and courage," are consistent with the religious instruction that civil rights leaders who were also ministers received (Morris, 1984, p. 8).

Robert Gaines (2010) defines the Black church as "the collective, largely denominational body of churches comprised primarily of African American people who, through communal worship, race consciousness, and civic engagement, operate as a locus of spiritual empowerment and social agency" (p. 369). Historically, the Black church has played a critical role in promoting social justice for African Americans. The pulpit led many community-organizing efforts in the church (Gaines, 2010; McCrary, Grant, & Beachum, 2010; Morris, 1984). Some of the clergy who led activist churches met together to network and launch social movements sparked within the Black community. Activist Black clergymen were steadfast about meeting the needs of the church community and were in a unique position to make decisions without being held accountable to those outside the community. These church leaders were typically charismatic and able to galvanize the support of their congregations (McCrary, Grant, & Beachum, 2010). Once a minister decided to support a particular cause, he could then influence members of his community to follow suit. The Black church was often the focal point of community organizing, especially in the South. For instance, in the South, the church was often the only place for the NAACP to hold meetings. The Southern

Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) was another social change organization that had religious ties.

Just as the church felt that it had a responsibility to help African Americans acquire the right to vote and access to public facilities during the civil rights era, Gaines (2010) argues that the modern Black church should feel the same way about ensuring a quality education for all African American children. He considers this particularly true if people regard education as a present-day civil rights issue (Gaines, 2010). Central to realizing this goal is the education and training of the church's congregation. As the church educated and trained its parishioners during the civil rights era, Gaines insists that it should educate and train them today in order to realize change in its communities. According to Gaines, "the modern Black church, with its vast bastion of economic, human, and social capital, is uniquely positioned to have an unprecedented impact on the Black community" (p. 367).

Gaines (2010) insists that the Black church is "virtually an inaudible voice" when it comes to issues concerning public education (p. 372). The modern Black church has not taken full advantage of its potential as a transformative agent in the community as a whole, and in the field of education in particular. Consequently, the Black church is a neglected resource (Green-Powell, Hilton, & Joseph, 2011). Gaines charges the church with recognizing the power that the church has in its large numbers and "cease relying on individuals to conjure up magical solutions for practical community problems" (Gaines, 2010, p. 377).

The federal administration recognizes the potential within faith-based communities to impact education. Although some religious leaders initially questioned

the melding of church and state, many now realize that they can provide a valuable service to supplement the needs of students in the public schools. In 1995, the Clinton Administration gave guidelines on developing partnerships between schools and faith-based organizations. In general, the guidelines require that the purpose of the partnership remain secular and that students are neither rewarded nor punished for their involvement or lack thereof. The Bush Administration further supported these partnerships with an Executive Order in 2001. The White House Office on Faith-based and Community Initiatives came out of that Executive Order, along with reduced regulations that previously kept faith-based organizations from partnering with government institutions. One example of particular note for this discussion is that in 2002, the Department of Juvenile Justice awarded a grant to Bethel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church in Florida. The grant supported after-school services such as mentoring and tutoring to elementary and middle school students. Patricia Green-Powell, Adriel Hilton, and Crystal Joseph (2011) implore Black churches to make assisting low-performing schools "part of their mission work" (p. 69).

Women Organizing

Women steered much of the work of the civil rights movement (Clark, 1986; Ransby, 2003; Warren & Mapp, 2011). Septima Clark and Ella Baker were among a number of Black women who were influential in the grass roots organizing that defined the civil rights era (Oakes & Rogers, 2006; Warren & Mapp, 2011). Septima Clark offers a powerful example for understanding how civil rights organizations developed. Clark was instrumental in teaching African Americans how to read so that they could register to vote. She was trained at the Highlander Folk School under the leadership of a White man

named Myles Horton. Highlander, which was located in Tennessee, was unique in that White and Black people came together under one roof to learn how to make change when they returned home. One of Clark's attempts at change, which she counts as the big failure of her life, was in trying to organize African American teachers in South Carolina to preserve their right to belong to the NAACP. In 1955, the South Carolina legislature barred city and state employees from belonging to the NAACP. When Clark, and 41 other teachers, refused to deny their membership, they lost their jobs. Clark felt that had she been able to get the 726 Black teachers to fight with her (i.e. use the power of large numbers), the state would have had to back down. She only managed to get four teachers to join her when she went to speak with the superintendent. This experience taught her some important lessons about organizing. She realized that she could not push people into something for which they were not ready. Instead, she needed to train them, and educate them on the seriousness of the issue before they would commit (Clark, 1986). After losing her teaching job, Clark took a job at the Highlander Folk School as the director of workshops.

While at Highlander, Clark began planning for a Citizenship Education Program which would teach people how to read, help them understand how governments worked, and prepare them to register to vote. Her work was interrupted when in 1959, the district attorney sent police officers to the Highlander School. The district attorney hoped to charge the school with the illegal sale of alcohol. Highlander had to close after police planted moonshine in a demijohn that they found in Myles Horton's cellar. Although Highlander had to close (temporarily), the work of the Citizenship Education Program continued. Eighty-two teachers were already trained at Highlander so by 1961, they were

ready to start holding classes in Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, and Tennessee. Clark traveled to multiple states forming relationships and building social capital. She shared the work of the Citizenship Schools and solicited input from community members to learn about their needs. Clark and other activists working with her, including Andrew Young and Barbara Jordan, expanded their work by training teachers to teach others. Between 1957-1970, Clark counted 897 Citizenship Schools all over the South. Clark stated, "One time I heard [Andrew] Young say that the Citizenship Schools were the base on which the whole civil rights movement was built. And that's probably very much true" (Clark, 1986, p. 70).

Stephen Lazar (2005) identifies Bernice Robinson's work as essential to the Citizenship Education Schools. Myles Horton, Esau Jenkins, and Septima Clark started an adult literacy class in the back of a farming supply store. They needed a teacher but decided not to hire someone with training (although Clark, a trained teacher herself, debated this issue with Horton somewhat [Horton & Freire, 1990]), nor did they want someone from the Black middle class. They wanted someone who would not treat the adults like children, a phenomenon that was causing other literacy education programs to fail. Clark suggested that they hire her niece, Bernice Robinson. Robinson, a beautician with experience working in a garment factory in New York, was hesitant initially but Horton insisted that she was the only person for the job and without her, they simply would not be able to open the school. Robinson's position as a beautician gave her "a privileged status in the community" (p. 10) and economic independence. Clark had lost her job as a teacher because of her affiliation with the NAACP. Robinson did not have to worry about losing her job. Further, the residents in the Johns Island community could

trust her because they knew her, unlike other Black people who lived on South Carolina's mainland.

Robinson's position as a beautician was significant. Because successful organizing depends on relationships, women beauticians are optimally positioned for organizing work. They already have the trust of their clients and they have their attention for at least the period of time that the clients are receiving services. Mary Davis, a fellow beautician, solicited Robinson's assistance in forming a Citizenship Education School in her community in Charleston. They started the class in Davis' beauty salon.

Robinson's ability to engage the adult learners in her class was exceptional. Paulo Freire commented on the "beauty" of her approach, which began with trusting relationships that placed the students' interests at the center of the learning experience. Because the students were invested, she was able to teach them how to read in only about three months, meeting for two hours two evenings each week. The program was remarkably successful, resulting in 75-80% of attendees being able to vote (Horton & Freire, 1990) and expanded quickly due to community demand.

Barbara Ransby (2003) describes the submission to White rule in the Jim Crow South as a façade. It is true that Black people had to carefully navigate the spaces between "deference and defiance" in the South (p. 194). But Black people had within them "a fighting spirit that needed only a viable outlet to demonstrate and to express itself in subtle ways every day" (p. 194). Civil rights organizers like Ella Baker were well aware of this fighting spirit. Ransby argues that in Baker's view, "oppressed people did not need a messiah to deliver them from oppression; all they needed was themselves, one another, and the will to persevere" (p. 188). Baker believed that ordinary people had

power within themselves to create change, and this power was not tethered to the leadership of any particular person. This philosophy contrasted with traditional organizations like the NAACP or the SCLC, both of which Clark and Baker were critical (Payne, 1995).

Ella Baker's approach to organizing was undoubtedly influenced by her upbringing (Ransby, 2003). Baker's experiences growing up in the South were atypical. Baker's parents were part of North Carolina's Black middle class. Her father did not allow her mother, Anna Baker to work, a privilege that poor Black people could not afford. Most Black people during the early 1900s worked as sharecroppers or domestic servants, placing them in constant contact with White people. Ella would not have many encounters with White people during her early years, however; she grew up in a community of Black people who had managed to create their own ways of producing income. In Ella's childhood neighborhood, a Black man owned the corner store, another Black man owned the ice cream store, others were carpenters or brick layers, and her neighbors had their own land. Baker and her siblings attended school year-round and later went to secondary school and college. Baker's family was educated, benefitting from both "land and literacy" which were "the two most significant determinants of class status" (Ransby, 2003, p. 43).

The unique nature of Baker's neighborhood fostered a greater sense of community and mutual responsibility than may have existed among poorer Black people. Families could only share with other families if the resources were there. Although poorer Black people operated with a "cooperative ethos" as well, particularly for survival purposes, without their own land it was more difficult for them to support one another

materially (Ransby, 2003, p. 38). This is the world in which Ella Baker grew up, a world where Black people had a sense of pride in themselves and knew how to work together to sustain their communities.

Baker was adamant about the source of a community's leadership. She stated that those who live and work in a community know best how to select a leader for a project than an outsider. The ability of leaders to prepare future leaders was also important. She argued that the NAACP needed a leadership training program so that when current leaders burned out, there would be others ready to step up and keep the work going. Her leadership conferences proved successful and were an important contribution to the NAACP. She believed that with the right tools, people could lead themselves.

Black people's fighting spirit became even more impactful when people united and fought collectively for change. And when Black people persevered in their fights, the power within the Black community manifested. Baker knew that not only did Black people have power within themselves, when they worked together they could make a significant impact. During the 1930s in Harlem, she "took on a role she continued to play for much of her political life, that of a behind-the-scenes organizer who paid attention to the mechanics of movement building in a way that few high-profile charismatic leaders did, or even knew how to do" (p. 81). Baker recognized the importance of allies across national and racial lines. She identified poor Whites, Indians, and Mexican Americans as natural allies for Black people. Baker viewed relationships as the "foundation of any sustained local organizing campaign and that it was the job of any outside organizer to identify and build on that foundation" (p. 117). Because of this, Baker made extensive visits to the South, staying for up to two weeks in any one location. Her extended visits

allowed her to get to know local activists, build relationships, learn the culture, and better acquaint herself with the issues that that community was facing.

Prior to the 1960s, activists in the South tended to take a more traditional, authoritarian conception of leadership. Baker is primarily responsible for changing this approach to leadership and activism, particularly through her work with the youth-led Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)[5] organization (Payne, 1995). Although litigation was necessary in the 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka* school desegregation case, actual change was a result of community organizing. According to Michelle Renée and Sara McAlister (2011), the largest community organizing effort followed the *Brown vs. Board* ruling. Without pressure from the African American community, education policy was, and still is unlikely to change despite the outcomes of litigation (Bell, 1996).

Influence of the African American Organizing Legacy

Community organizing, particularly in the civil rights tradition, attempts to address both the technical work of education reform and the deconstruction of racist and classist beliefs. Current organizing efforts that address the school-to-prison pipeline primarily follow the civil rights tradition, but they appear to have some Alinsky influences as well. Community-based organizations that are working to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline practice forming relationships, soliciting input from community

[5] SNCC began as a sit-in movement. On February 1, 1960, four Black college students sat at a Whites-only lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina and refused to move until they were served. After several days, the store finally served the young men. Within weeks, thousands of youth joined in the protest in over 100 cities, and White resistance grew into violent attacks. Baker requested that the leaders of these sit-ins meet at a conference in Raleigh, North Carolina. Here, Baker helped the students form a clear identity and strategy for future action. By the end of the three-day conference, SNCC was born (Ransby, 2003).

members to learn about their needs, and employing strategies to create change and protect the work of their movements. Also, by educating and training community members, these community organizations are able to build a collective of people who are ready and willing to fight against injustice. The actions of these organizations seek to contribute to the expression of power by educating and mobilizing members of the community.

The number of community organizations working in the field of education has grown tremendously in recent years, but the amount of scholarship on these organizations is small. In fact, nonprofit organizations, think tanks, and foundations produce most of the research on the impact of community organizing (Schutz, 2006). Similarly, the school-to-prison pipeline is a relatively new area of investigation, tracing its roots to zero tolerance policies during the War on Drugs and increased security measures following the Columbine Shooting in 1999 (Advancement Project, 2005; Skiba, 2000). Thus, the amount of scholarship on community organizations with a focus on education and a specific sub-focus on the school-to-prison pipeline is scant. The existing documentation highlights the successes of these organizations and show how much more scholarship we need to develop in the area of community organizing to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline.

Parent-Led Organizing

Increasingly, parents are looking beyond what they can do within the home and at school and are engaging in their communities to improve the academic experiences of their children. Parents are most successful with causing change when they work with well-developed community organizations (Renée and McAlister, 2011). There are multiple examples of parents becoming involved in community organizing to challenge

seemingly unchangeable conditions in schools. Renée and McAlister (2011) define community organizing as "a strategy that specifically works to increase the power of a marginalized community so that residents can speak and act for themselves" (p. 5). They state that the leadership structure and power in the group should come from members of the community, but their work is most successful when combined with researchers, political leaders, educators, and school and district leadership. In their synthesis of the research, they found that community organizing not only improves student academic outcomes, but improves school, district, and community capacity to work more effectively on behalf of students. Citing the work of other scholars (Renée, Welner & Oakes, 2010; Shirley, 2009), Renée and McAlister admit that community organizing has serious challenges, including a focus on short-term goals over long-term systemic changes, a lack of resources, and the overall difficulties of working with competing interests at the federal, state, and local levels. Still, community organizers can have success when their goals are politically feasible, when they collaborate with other organizations, and if they can attain the financial support of foundations or a collective of foundations, such as the Communities for Public Education Reform (CPER).

The number of community groups organized to reform public education has grown considerably in recent years. According to Mark Warren and Karen Mapp (2011), such groups were hard to find 25 years ago. By the year 2000, there were about 200 community groups with a focus on public education. Presently, there are roughly 500 of these groups (Warren & Mapp, 2011). Jean Anyon (2005) states that organizing for education is distinct from community organizing. Organizing for education focuses on building parent leadership and social capital within communities. Community organizing

has a long history but current efforts differ from the organizing that took place during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Warren & Mapp, 2011). Most community organizing during the 1970s and 1980s centered on community development issues like housing, job training, and neighborhood blight (Warren & Mapp, 2011). During the civil rights era, concerns arose about educational equity, spurring African American and Hispanic communities to demand community control of education in several cities, including New York, Detroit, and Chicago (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Podair, 2001). Community organizations during the civil rights era were often citywide, they had a particular purpose, and thus they were not attempting to build a permanent base. Current community organizing, however, is more "neighborhood-based" and focuses on multiple issues (Warren & Mapp, 2011).

A focus on multiple issues is important for the health and impact of a community organization (Alinsky, 1971; Warren & Mapp, 2011). In order to see significant changes in communities, many organizations work to impact the social and political environments within and around the school community (Renée & McAlister, 2011). This work typically happens under the leadership of members of the community. A community may refer to a geographic locality, like a neighborhood, but it may also refer to a racial-ethnic group of people who do not live in physical proximity to each other (Warren & Mapp, 2011). Even more broadly, community "refers to a condition in which people share something with each other" (Schutz, 2006, p. 693). When communities organize to make reforms to public education, these communities are usually low-income communities and communities of color (Renée & McAlister, 2011, p. 5).

Organizing for education reform in low-income communities mirrors the influence of parents in more affluent communities because of their demands for accountability (Anyon, 2005). Community organizing is not equivalent to the work of advocacy organizations, service providers, or nonprofit organizations although the involvement of these groups makes community organizations more successful (Renée & McAlister, 2011; Warren & Mapp, 2011). The kinds of people involved in community organizations, their methods, and their organizing structures vary, but many share commonalities that allow researchers to make some generalizations. Besides often sharing a racial-ethnic background, or possibly a low-income level, other commonalities among community groups include the ways in which these organizations develop and operate.

Community organizations typically begin with organizing campaigns during which groups build social and political capital (Mediratta, Shah, & McAlister, 2009). Social capital refers to the accumulation of "actual or potential resources" that are tied to membership in a group of individuals (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 21). The "volume" of social capital depends on the number of people in this network that a person can mobilize or influence (Bourdieu, 1986). Yet increasing social capital does not automatically generate an increase in political capital (Mediratta, Shah, & McAlister, 2009). Political capital, or the ability to determine how economic and cultural resources get distributed, is of considerable importance for community organizations. The social and political capital of an organization impacts the amount of power or influence that it has to get its demands met. Renée and McAlister (2011) argue that community organizations use the collective

power of parents, youth, community members, and institutions to challenge the existing power relationships that have led to inequalities in schools.

Summary

Research shows that schools are not meeting the needs of African American and Hispanic students and students with disabilities. A history of criminalization based on appearance and zero tolerance policies have unduly impacted students of color and students with disabilities. Scholars have identified culturally sensitive ways to address these problems, such as PBIS and restorative justice, but not all schools have fully adopted these practices. Increasingly, parents are getting involved in community organizations to advocate for reform to improve their children's educational experiences. This research study will examine how one organization strives to reduce disparities in discipline rates by advocating for culturally sensitive alternatives to exclusionary discipline.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

A Culturally Centered Design

Methodology is "a theory of how inquiry should proceed. It involves analysis of the assumptions, principles, and procedures in a particular approach to inquiry that in turn, governs the use of particular methods" (Schwandt, 2007, p. 193). Methodologies best serve the research participants when they grow out of the context of the study as opposed to the researcher imposing a methodology on a population (Schreiber, 2000). Although I position myself within an African-centered framework, my participants came from various racial-ethnic backgrounds. So I determined to create a culturally centered research project that privileged my participants' cultural and epistemological positions. In my design, I borrowed from scholarship on African-centered methodology (Kershaw, 1992; Schreiber, 2000), social justice research (Lyons, Bike, Ojeda, Johnson, Rosales, & Flores, 2013), and culturally responsive/sensitive research (Tillman, 2002; Trainor & Bal, 2014). The social justice and culturally responsive/sensitive research frameworks overlap considerably. Because they share similar criteria and aims, I draw from both but use much of Lyons et al.'s terminology because it is more cogent and descriptive.

When defining culture, I prefer Tillman's (2002) definition, which states that culture is "a group's individual and collective ways of thinking, believing, and knowing, which includes their shared experiences, consciousness, skills, values, forms of expression, social institutions, and behaviors" (p. 4). When I state that I conducted culturally centered research, I am saying that I placed the contextualized history of a group of people at the center of the study. Thus I privileged their worldviews and their

epistemologies (i.e. ways of knowing) throughout the research experience. In order to do this, I aspired to the following four criteria: equity, access, participation, and harmony (Lyons et al., 2013).

Equity is "a subjective sense of fairness" (p. 12). As an equitable researcher, I reflected on the research process as well as the content, focus, and outcomes of the study. Access "refers to one's right to power, information, and opportunity" (p. 12). The community has a right to research that it can recognize and utilize (Lyons et al., 2013; Trainor & Bal, 2014). Participation refers to the ability of the community to be involved in the process. Further, it invites a description of how my participants interacted with me as a researcher (Goulet, 1971; Trainor & Bal, 2014). Harmony privileges a study's benefit to the community over any benefit to the researcher. Below I describe the stages or "aspects" of this research design (Lyons et al., 2013). Using Lyons et al.'s terminology, the aspects include Development and Preparation, Data Collection, Data Analysis and Interpretation, and Application. Within each aspect, I aspired to meet the aforementioned criteria of equity, access, participation, and harmony.

Development and Preparation

In the Development and Preparation aspect of research, I attended to access by building relationships in the community before data collection. For two years before generating data for this study, I was a participant observer in the Parent Empowerment Program (PEP). I spent most of the first year getting to know the director, Hope, and observing how the organization operated. I attended nearly every Saturday training session, including the graduation ceremony. During the second year I continued my involvement and was able to get to know the other members personally. Hope introduced

me to the group at the first training session and from that point on, the members welcomed me each month. I participated in workshops and discussions with the groups and had lunch with them each month. The parents seemed interested in my insights as a teacher and as a graduate student. I attended two other community events that Hope advertised to the group and I attended the graduation ceremony for the second-year cohort as well. I did all of this before asking anyone to participate in my study.

I also attended to participation by soliciting Hope's feedback on the types of questions she wanted to see answered in a study of this organization. Although I considered exploring other aspects of the program that were of greater interest to me, an analysis of my interview data revealed that Hope knew best what kinds of questions would provide an accurate assessment of her program. Some of the very questions that she initially proposed were the ones that I found emerging answers to in the data. This illustrated the importance of including the participants in the design of a research study.

I aspired to harmony when I considered the benefits and potential consequences of the research in the community. I was careful about designing a study that was too ambitious. Lyons et al. (2013) state that researchers need to consider the potential outcomes of a study and ask themselves questions like: "'Can the results suggest interventions that are too costly for communities to burden?' and 'Is it possible that those interventions in which communities have invested are ineffective?'" (p. 14). I believe that for this study the answer to each of these questions is "no," but I did spend time reflecting on questions like these. I wanted my study to be honest and transparent, but I did not want to place a burden on the organization or make any of the participants feel like all of their hard work and time was for naught. My study does reveal the weaknesses

and areas for growth in the organization, but it also identifies strengths that PEP can continue to develop and expand upon in its work.

One other feature of this initial aspect is the characteristics of the researcher. When I design a research study, I do so with all of my subjectivities, assumptions, values, and beliefs (Goulet, 1971; Trainor & Bal, 2014). I conducted this study reflectively, aware that these subjectivities, assumptions, values, and beliefs were always present during the study and even now as I reflect and write about what I did. Because "even ethical researchers who otherwise consider themselves multiculturally competent can fall prey to unintentional injustice" (Lyons et al., 2013, p. 15), I attempted to minimize the chances for these injustices by sharing my work with the director, my dissertation committee, and others for their feedback.

Research Questions

My research on the Parent Empowerment Program examined these research questions:

1. What role does the cultural heritage of the participants play in the organization's work?
2. What impacts has the organization had on the participants, community, and on reducing discipline disparities in the school system to date?
3. How did members of the organization work to raise parents' awareness about school discipline reform, and facilitate parents' involvement in culturally sensitive approaches to reducing disparities in school discipline?
4. What factors supported or hindered the organization's work?
5. What can the organization do to improve its efforts in the future?

Data Collection

During the Data Collection aspect, I involved participants in respectful and ethical ways, thereby attending to issues of access, participation, equity, and harmony (Lyons et al., 2013). Recruitment often requires the support of gatekeepers in the community. This support results from relationships built with the gatekeeper through volunteering or otherwise participating in the community. Related to this, building trust and interest among the participants contributed to the feasibility of data collection (Trainor & Bal, 2014). I was fortunate to have Hope partner with me in a sense. I believe that she trusted that I was committed to the community and so she granted me access to other participants in PEP and in the Dunham community. I would not have been able to conduct this study without her support. My presence in the group before I began the study helped to build trust, and possibly interest as well, among the participants.

Research Site and Participants

This research took place in Dunham County (pseudonym), a suburb of a metropolitan city in the South. Dunham County Public Schools is among the largest school districts in the state. Although technically a suburb, Dunham includes areas that have demographics characteristic of urban areas, including high concentrations of students of color and families with a low socioeconomic status. The leadership in the district, namely the school board, is currently all White and until about five years ago, not a single public school in the district had ever had an African American male head principal. Some local media depictions of teachers and school leaders reflect a general distrust of the district's interest in meeting the needs of students of color and in some

cases, citizens have accused teachers and school leaders, up to and including the district superintendent and school board members, of racism.

Recruiting.

I used one criterion for identifying potential participants, which was their membership in PEP (Rudestom & Newton, 2007). I initially invited 22 members of PEP from years one and two to participate. Nine expressed an interest to help, but only eight were able to actually meet with me (see Table 2). Fortunately, these eight participants represented each of the projects for the first two years, with four members of the first-year cohort and four members of the second-year cohort. The participants were also

Table 2. *Demographics of Research Participants from the Parent Empowerment Program*

Participant	**Race/Ethnicity**	**Age**	**Marital Status**	**Number of Children**	**Children's Grade Level**
Robin	African American	early 50s	Divorced	3	High School (1), Adult (2)
Tina	Other	early 40s	Married	2	Elementary School
Melia	African American	mid 40s	Single	1	(Deceased)
Shelby	White	mid 40s	Married	2	High School
Adele	African American	early 50s	Married	2	Adult
Shannon	African American	mid 40s	Married	2	Middle School
Leslie	African American	late 30s	Single	0	N/A
Melanie	African American	late 30s	Single	4	Elementary (1), Middle (1), Adult (2)

perfectly split between projects, with two members representing each project each year. An additional six participants included the director, one of the workshop facilitators, and four other members of the community for a total of 14 (see Table 3). I felt sufficiently saturated with data on the PEP participants' experiences after interviewing the eight members (Rudestam & Newton, 2007).

Table 3. *Summary of Research Participants from the Community*

Participant	**Gender**	**Race/ Ethnicity**	**Description**
Hope	F	African American	• Co-founder and director of PEP
Natalie	F	White	• Parent coordinator at Young Middle School • Assisted the second-year PBIS team
Elena	F	Hispanic	• Coordinator at statewide organization supporting parents of children with disabilities • Refers parents to DCP3/PEP
Sabrina	F	White	• Works for an organization that trains students in education reform • Attended Saturday training sessions as an auditor during the first year of the PEP program
Minister Anthony Corben	M	African American	• Director of social services at Christ Church • Supported the second-year PBIS team
Courtney	M	African American	• Cultural diversity and communications facilitator for PEP workshops

Snowball sampling.

After generating my initial group of participants, I used respondent-driven or "snowball" sampling to reach community members who had some knowledge of PEP. Chaim Noy (2008) defines snowball sampling as a procedure by which "the researcher accesses informants through contact information that is provided by other informants" (p. 330). The process is so common with qualitative research that few bother to reflect on it (Noy, 2008). There are two key ideas to consider in sampling. One is social knowledge. Noy argues "when sampling methods are employed in qualitative research, they lead to dynamic moments where unique social knowledge of an interactional quality can be fruitfully generated" (p. 328). Snowball sampling is a process involving movement. Further, snowball sampling "is *essentially social* because it both uses and activates existing social networks" (p. 332). My hope was that the PEP participants maintained connections with the people who participated in, or otherwise supported their projects and that they would reach out to them on my behalf. I asked every PEP member for referrals and ended up with five additional participants for the study. In part, I believe that this may have something to do with Noy's (2008) second key idea involved in snowball sampling: power relations.

Power relations exist between the researcher and participant, but also among the participants themselves. As the researcher, I had no authority over the participants to insist that they follow through on my requests. I did not have permission from my school's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ask for anyone's contact information so I had to rely on my participants to contact others for me. Most of my participants spoke often about how "busy" they were and I know that in some cases, my participants simply

forgot or did not make reaching out to others a priority. I followed up with them via email and asked about their contacts during our second interviews, but usually participants responded that they had not yet had a chance to contact anyone. The exceptions to these are, of course, those few community members who did respond and participate.

At least one relationship among the participants was such that it resulted in an additional participant for the study. One of the eight PEP participants did not respond to my request to participate until after her friend completed an interview with me. The participants likely had less influence in their relationships with the other community members. During the period of time that they worked on their projects, many participants had to seek assistance from their potential contacts in the community and may have been hesitant to ask for yet another favor. Also, in Melia's case, her contacts did not even want to participate in her project. She described the teachers that she had talked to as fearful, almost terrorized at the thought of being exposed for speaking out against the unjust practices in the county. Because these teachers already had a relationship with Melia and were still afraid to work with her, I knew that I had less than favorable chances of getting them to speak with me. Similarly, Hope mentioned that many of the parents and school employees who get involved in the umbrella organization, DCP3, do so "underground." In other words, they do not publicize their involvement, and DCP3 keeps their identities confidential. In order to supplement my data, I used discriminate sampling to complete the study, relying on documents, data sets, a video, and other archival information that I describe in a later section (Rudestam & Newton, 2007).

The Data Collection aspect also looks at issues of consent. Traditionally, researchers develop consent guidelines and participants give their consent *once* for the duration of the study. I practiced a level of process consent, meaning that I allowed my participants to withdraw information from the study even in the midst of an interview. For instance, upon request from a few participants, I deleted information from transcripts that the participants wanted to remain "off the record." Whenever a participant said this to me explicitly, I honored the request. One participant, after completing an interview, contacted me to make sure that certain information was not used for this study. In this case, I returned a transcript to the participant to ensure that I had removed all of the information that she did not want recorded. Interacting with the participants in harmony was more important than any data that I might have lost with these requests.

Hope's power and my obligation.

Hope was a driving force in this study, from PEP's inception to the culmination of this manuscript. It was no small thing for Hope to let me have access to this organization. During one of our interviews, Hope shared how the participants in this group were akin to her own children:

> It's just always just that new great experience each time I watch them…watching the growth just like watching your children grow up and flower [laughs] and when they even continue on and do their projects out in the community, I still get the same kind of wonder and amazement, and pride is what it is I guess—pride. Really, really happy for them and happy that we were able to give them the opportunity to get there.

PEP was her "baby," and if she believed that I would cause it any harm, I would not have been allowed to come anywhere near it. This of course, put me in a position to want to protect Hope's baby as well—and to want to protect her. Without Hope, I could not have begun, yet alone completed this study. Hope was there in the beginning. She is one of PEP's co-founders and she helped to select those who became a part of the organization. Hope was a gatekeeper not just for the organization, but also for this study. She was the first person that I contacted to learn more about PEP. She invited me to every training session and community event. She allowed me to contact the parents and helped me reach out to other community members. I could do very little, if anything, without her support. So, while I have strived to balance my role as a researcher with the trust Hope placed in me, quite naturally I also wanted the study to reflect favorably upon her and the participants. This aspiration of harmony stems from the African cultural heritage and the social justice contribution to this methodology (Lyons et al., 2013).

The participants also wanted to speak favorably about Hope as their leader/mother/guide during their time in this organization. There was hesitancy among the participants to say anything negative about her. Most exuded a sense of admiration for her—her knowledge, her passion, and her leadership in educational advocacy. Yet the participants were always aware that eventually, even with the pseudonyms, Hope would read about what they told me. This awareness undoubtedly influenced what participants would and would not share with me.

All of this created tension in the study. There was tension in the interviews as participants carefully chose their words. When words were not chosen perfectly, I got requests to omit certain information from "the record". Even now there is tension as I

write about all of this. The ever-present question as I work is: "What will Hope think when she reads this?"

Not every participant shied from criticisms. Some shared their critiques freely, and I have included those that are relevant to this work. Undoubtedly, I made some judgment calls in determining which critiques were relevant and which were unnecessary for answering the research questions in this study. Further, I am certain that I chose the words to frame these critiques very carefully. Yet my respect for Hope displaces any desire to conceal critiques of her work or the organization as a whole. Anything less would not honor her or the participants. Further, it would not honor the trust that she has given me to do this study and to share the truth about how PEP has operated for the past two years. So I engaged with the tensions in my efforts to give an honest account of the organization's work and the vitality of her leadership.

My role.

Just as Hope's presence affected this research study, my presence and participation influenced the development of this work. During the first two years of my involvement with PEP, I attended training sessions and participated in discussions. As the sole K-12 teacher in the room during most of those sessions, my insights undoubtedly contributed to the knowledge base in the room, and informed the participants' organizing work in the community. I was the "expert" on teacher practices, at least during the training sessions. Some (if not all) of the participants perceived me as an expert during our interviews as well. Although I cannot say with certainty how this assigned role shaped their responses to all of my questions, I can say that several trusted the insight that came from my "frontline" experiences in the classroom. After my first interview with

Robin, she pulled out her audio recorder and interviewed *me* about my perspective on education. Others sought my "off-the-record" advice on issues affecting their children and/or their schools. I never just gathered data from my participants; we generated data together and shared in conversations that could potentially benefit each of us. This reciprocal relationship aligns with the underlying African-centered orientation of this research study.

Further, as this study progressed, the research experience had an influence on me. When I began my research, I relied on Saul Alinsky's (1971) approach to help me understand the history of community organizing in the U.S. After beginning my interviews and comparing the emerging themes to other organizing frameworks, increasingly, I found that Alinsky's approach contrasted with African American cultural values. Of particular significance was Alinsky's lack of focus on relationship building, which was of critical importance within PEP and with members of the community. This realization negated my initial confidence in Alinsky's work as a model for education reform. I include references to his work to exemplify the contrast between his approach and an African-centered approach to organizing. Of course, the remaining models have flaws and limitations as well, which I discuss in more depth in Chapter 5.

I also wish to acknowledge that my own African consciousness increased throughout this study. I strengthened my ability to critique Eurocentric frameworks for their limitations. I also grew in my ability to identify the influence of the African American cultural heritage in this study and in my own approach to the research. My methodology departed from Western, conventional approaches to qualitative research. Critical to my work as a researcher was the African cultural ideal of reciprocity. I never

wanted to only "take" from my participants. I definitely wanted the study to inform PEP's practices and support Hope's efforts. I also needed the study to benefit my participants in some way. As mentioned earlier, I gave "off-the-record" insights to parents to help them navigate the educational landscape and to support their work in the community. I shared my perspective as a teacher on the challenges that they were having with their children. For example, during a discussion with Shelby about how schools should modify their approaches to discipline, I opened up about and shared my feelings on how teachers can get emotional as well:

> Shelby: Because once you offend a teacher, [laughs] I think the kids feel like for the rest of the year, that teacher doesn't like me, and I can't talk to 'em anymore. I'mma get suspended and my mom is gonna kill me.
>
> Me: It's hard! Like, I'm a teacher and…I get mad, too! Y'know, we're human, and so it can be a challenge.

During the interviews, I sought to encourage the participants. For instance, at the end of my first interview with Shannon, she described all of the contributions of her other group members but questioned the value of her own:

> Shannon: And at one point I wondered what do I really have to give this group other than just passion?
>
> Me: Well, that's something that not everyone has…
>
> Shannon: [laughs]
>
> Me: And I think I mentioned to your husband [at the graduation ceremony] it was just nice just to see you every time I came to the [PEP] meeting 'cause I knew if

> no one else showed me love, [Shannon] was going to show me love. So it was always great for me to see you.

The participants also encouraged me, often wishing me well with the study and sharing that they looked forward to hearing of my completing my degree.

Summary of the tensions.

As discussed in the previous sections and modeled in Figure 3, this research study both influenced, and was influenced by, multiple actors. African culture, ontology, and epistemology informed my worldview and ultimately, the culturally centered research methodology. My experiences in the classroom and the formal and informal education that I have received have also shaped my worldview. This education includes my learning about community organizing, including the African American organizing legacy. All of this informed the research questions for this study and the way I conducted the study.

Hope also helped to inform the research questions for this study. The relationship between Hope and the remaining participants determined what information these participants shared with me. Notably, Hope's influence on the PEP participants was not the same as her influence on other community members. Although some of the community members (Elena, Sabrina, and Courtney) had a direct connection to Hope, Minister Corben and Natalie's connections to PEP were primarily through other PEP members. Therefore, Minister Corben and Natalie were probably less likely to be concerned about how their responses reflected on Hope. In fact, neither of them even mentioned Hope in their interviews. They may have been more likely to care about how

their responses reflected on the PEP members with whom they worked on the community projects.

Figure 3. Tensions in the Research Study

Methods

Culturally centered research uses a variety of methods, including qualitative interviews, to develop a contextualized view of the participants' experiences (Asante, 1990; Kershaw, 1992; Schreiber, 2000; Tillman, 2002). I conducted an interview study, supplementing my data with various documents procured online, one document from my participants, and a YouTube video linked to DCP3's website.

Interviewing.

I took the "general interview" approach for my interviews (Turner, 2010). This approach is more structured than the informal conversational interview, in which the researcher and participants engage in spontaneous conversations through natural interactions. Qualitative interviewing in general encourages researchers to share information about themselves with participants (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012; Rubin & Rubin, 2005), and culturally centered interviewing emphasizes the reciprocal relationship between researchers and participants (Kershaw, 1992; Tillman, 2002; Trainor & Bal, 2014). I shared information about myself when it seemed appropriate to do so. The general interview approach allowed for flexibility with the way I posed questions. The challenge with this is that respondents did not consistently answer the same questions. This, however, was not necessarily my goal. Participants interacted with PEP from different vantage points. Giving each participant the same interview would not have produced valuable data. Instead, I developed three interview protocols to account for the range of relationships the participants had with PEP. I asked PEP participants questions from one protocol. I asked the director questions from a separate protocol. The

community members did not have a set protocol. I developed a set of questions for them depending on their connection to the program and each set of questions was different.

I interviewed each PEP participant twice. The first interviews lasted about an hour, with the follow up interviews lasting anywhere from 20 to 60 minutes. The one exception to this was Tina, who was unable to talk for a full hour during the first interview. The variation in time for the follow up interview generally depended on how busy the participant was, and how much the participant seemed to just want to sit and chat. Some loved to tell stories, and if I thought the story might lead to some interesting data, I would sit and listen. This practice was especially helpful in interviewing Hope, who always gave me more than I asked for, including things that I did not realize I needed to know. I interviewed her twice, and each interview lasted about an hour. I interviewed each remaining community member once, with each interview lasting between 30-90 minutes depending, again, on how much the participant had time to share. I audio recorded the interviews and transcribed each interview myself using the ExpressScribe software.

Documents.

Another valuable source of data for this study was documents. Documents are more than just pieces of paper; they include drawings, diaries, web pages, and archives among many other products. According to Lindsay Prior (2003), documents "are essentially social products. They are constructed in accordance with rules, they express a structure, they are nestled within a specific discourse, and their presence in the world depends on collective, organized action" (p. 13). Documents are containers of information that are produced and consumed (Prior, 2003). In light of this, documents

can offer a great amount of insight into what is taking place in an organization, but also the context of these events and the nature of the relations between those who produce and consume the document.

I used several documents that the PEP organization shared with me, including a Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) matrix for one of the PEP projects. I relied on information published on the Dunham County Parent Power Program (DCP3) website, including a link to a video posted on YouTube and various press releases. I used information from the local school district's website, the district government's website, and local media sources. I mined data from the state's department of education website and the federal Office for Civil Rights Data Collection. Finally, I relied on my own documents and memos that I have kept over the years to help me analyze this organization's work. (For a full list of documents, see Appendix A.)

Quality

Some scholars identify trustworthiness as a criterion for validating social science research (Denzin, 2004; Patton, 2002). According to Michael Patton (2002), a researcher demonstrates credibility and legitimacy (i.e. trustworthiness) by emphasizing "those criteria that have priority within that tradition" (p. 544). In this section I discuss some of the criteria for trustworthiness that exist within the African-centered tradition, the social justice tradition, culturally responsive research, and qualitative research more generally.

To demonstrate trustworthiness, I approached the work holistically by situating it in a context that placed the culture, values, and history of the participants in the center of inquiry (Asante, 1990; Kershaw, 1992; Patton, 2002; Tillman, 2002; Trainor & Bal, 2014). I began with an acknowledgement of the work of African American's ancestors

during the civil rights era. I also probed into each participant's history with their children's disciplinary experiences before going into detail about their current work with PEP.

A second way to show trustworthiness is by acknowledging multiple forms of knowledge. When my participants said that they "knew" something, I attended to their ways of knowing (see Appendix B for a discussion of how I employed culturally centered ways of knowing). Even while privileging this knowledge, I juxtaposed their information with what other participants shared and with relevant documents, careful to consider any sources of contradiction and at times, posing questions to other participants to gain clarity on perspectives that did not seem to align (Tillman, 2002). Rudestam and Newton (2007) call this process of "cross-checking" triangulation and recommend it as a way to ensure trustworthiness in qualitative studies. Instead of limiting my "cross-checking" to a three-pronged triangulation, I employed the use of crystallization (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). Crystallization is the use of multiple methods to ensure quality in research.

Third, I attempted to reduce the distance between the participants and me as the researcher (Asante, 1990; Goulet, 1971; Johnson-Bailey, 2004; Schreiber, 2000; Tillman, 2002). Here, I demonstrated trustworthiness by keeping my commitment throughout this study to support the organization and surrounding community whenever feasible and ethical to do so. This mostly took the form of participating in Saturday training sessions, sharing information with the group about opportunities to learn more about discipline reform, and attending community events when invited.

Some of Patton's (2002) other criteria for trustworthiness include authenticity, reflexivity, and particularity. I ensured authenticity by accurately recording and

presenting what my participants told me. When participants share their stories from their perspectives, African-centered researchers accept them as true even if those stories only represent a part of the truth, namely the truth from that person's perspective (King & Mitchell, 1995; Tillman, 2002). I distinguished what the participants deemed as true by quoting them directly as much as possible and clarifying the vantage point of the information that I shared. I used reflexivity by reviewing my subjectivities (discussed later) and questioning my choices of what information to report and what stories to omit. I broke positivist conventions to attempt to remain distant, and risked "going native" according to qualitative traditions (King & Mitchell, 1995). Joyce King and Carolyn Mitchell (1995) address this concern when they state: "The collaborative strategy of making our premises and assumptions known to the participants in our responses to the questions we posed is a more ethically acceptable, if partisan stance, than pseudo-objectivity that is oblivious to one's own values and perspectives" (p. 73-74). Finally, particularity refers to "doing justice to unique cases" (Patton, 2002, p. 544). This parent organization is a unique case, and is easily identifiable with certain pieces of information. So although I attempted to represent the organization accurately and fairly, I also concealed information in an effort to protect its members.

Ensuring quality with transcription.

According to Christina Davidson (2009), a failure to attend to the method of transcribing should raise questions of trustworthiness in qualitative studies. To further corroborate my data, I include a discussion of my transcription process. Approaches to transcription typically lie on a continuum from naturalism to denaturalism (Oliver, Serovich, & Mason, 2005). Naturalist transcripts include every utterance, pause, and

nonverbal cues. Transcribers who use a denaturalized approach remove these excess sounds. The goal is an accurate depiction of meaning. Arguments in favor of naturalism point to a desire to retain the perspective and voice of the participant. The involuntary vocalizations (e.g. laughing, coughing), response tokens (e.g. um, yeah, okay), and nonverbal vocalizations (e.g. fidgeting, head nodding) can either serve as distractors or give insight into meaning. Critics of naturalism argue state that it is erroneous to believe that the transcriber does not have some influence over how she transcribes the data. Other arguments against a naturalistic approach identify the potential to privilege certain forms of speech over others. In particular, transcripts of interviews with participants with geo-ethnic accents and those who speak African American English (AAE), if transcribed naturalistically, run the risk of highlighting differences in race and class and possibly offending research participants. Oliver et al. (2005) encourage researchers to reflect carefully on their choices. During their reflection they asked themselves "if the transcript would look different if the participant was the transcriber" (p. 10). The authors suggest that in some cases, it may prove advantageous to have two versions of a transcript—a naturalistic one initially, and then a denaturalized transcript in which the researcher can focus on meaning in the analysis (Oliver et al., 2005).

Given the multitude of response tokens that I use when I speak during interviews, and my desire to remove as many as possible, it was only just that I did the same for my participants who did not all have the opportunity to see their words in black and white. I conducted my initial transcription naturalistically. I did not want to risk losing meaning and having to go back to my recordings. Yet in my final report, I wanted to represent my participants in a way that would not embarrass or offend, while still preserving the

meaning of the conversation. So I made some careful, reflective decisions in how I denaturalized some of the text. For example, some of my participants said "y'know" often, and one participant said it at the end of nearly every sentence. While less noticeable within the conversation, the repetition of this phrase distracts the reader when it appears on paper. At times, I left the phrase when it seemed necessary to convey meaning (e.g. when "y'know" means "do you agree?") or when the participant seemed to need a response from me in order to continue speaking (e.g. when "y'know" means "do you know what I'm trying to say?").

Ethics

I have addressed many of Denis Goulet's (1971) imperatives for ethical research in the previous sections. Goulet insists that an ethical model for studying the values of a community begins by forming relationships and building trust with the members of the community. Second, the research should take place on multiple levels that include not just the individual focus of the study but the context up to the larger philosophical worldview of the community. Third, researchers should reflect critically with members of the community on the research study. Finally, the community has the opportunity to review the results of the research. They may choose to accept, correct, or reject the outcomes. The community has the "final veto" over the results of the study (Goulet, 1971, p. 222). The intersection of Goulet's model and the culturally centered framework that I discussed here suggest that to center the culture of a group in a research study is synonymous with being an ethical researcher.

Of course, I also followed ethical parameters established by my university's Institutional Review Board (IRB). IRBs follow ethical guidelines written in the Belmont

Report, which include respect of persons and justice (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1978; cited in Tisdale, 2004). I showed respect of persons by honoring the autonomy of my participants. Additionally, I showed justice by not burdening those who may already be burdened. Parents already sacrificed a considerable amount of time to participate in this organization. So I scheduled interviews at times and locations that were most convenient for them. I kept all data confidential and gave all participants, names of organizations, residential communities, churches, schools, and the school district a pseudonym. Some participants expressed relief to know that I would not identify them or the organization by name, and this made them more comfortable sharing information with me. In this way, I broke the tradition of other community organizing scholarship and concealed identifying characteristics of the organization.

Subjectivities/Reflexivity

I have traveled to three countries in the African Diaspora—Ethiopia, Haiti, and the Bahamas. In each country, I felt connected to the people in a way that is difficult to explain. I liken it to attending a family reunion. I may not know everyone present, and they may not have ever heard of me, but none of that changes the fact (and perhaps the feeling) that we are related. I remember remarking to an African American friend while we were in Ethiopia that we (Black people) are the same everywhere, and without any further explanation, he shook his head in agreement. As I read and inquire more about my African ancestry, I find myself making sense of the "knowing" that I have always felt about who I am as a person of African descent. I do not expect that all of my participants in this research study have consciously considered their connection to African ways of

being, but I still found evidence of this connection (Hilliard, 1992; Lee, 1994; Nobles, 2006).

In many ways, my background will connect me to the members of the organization that I wish to study. My class, ethnicity, and gender connected me to most of the participants, while simultaneously differentiating me from others. None shared my position as doctoral student although one community member has completed a PhD (and was therefore very sympathetic to my need for research participants!). One of my participants (Leslie) shared my sentiment of being an "outsider" because neither of us had children.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

During the Data Analysis and Interpretation aspect, I reflected on my influence on the data (Lyons et al., 2013). This contrasts with other paradigms, which favor distance as an attempt to increase objectivity in social science research. Researchers can increase trustworthiness during Data Analysis and Interpretation by utilizing direct quotes from participants and member checks. These practices attend to equity, harmony, access, and participation. In the chapters that follow, the reader will find that I used much of my participants' language when sharing their stories through substantive direct quotes. I also go into detail in my discussion about quality (in a later section of this chapter) to share how I transcribed my interview data to ensure that these direct quotes accurately conveyed each participant's perspective.

During the Data Analysis and Interpretation Aspect, socially just researchers can also include participants in the coding process. While this increases access and participation, my participants had enough difficulty making time for interviews. I did not

feel it was at all feasible to expect them to participate in data analysis with me. I did invite the director to review a draft of the manuscript prior to defending it before my committee.

Before beginning the first phase of data analysis, Virginia Braun and Victoria Clark (2006) encourage researchers to ask key questions to guide their approach. I chose to conduct a thematic analysis because, as Braun and Clark share, it is a foundational method that I could apply to almost any qualitative research. Thematic analysis is "a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 79). Unlike discourse analysis, grounded theory, and other methods of analysis that embody particular theoretical underpinnings, thematic analysis is "essentially independent of theory and epistemology" (p. 78). So I can utilize a thematic analysis with almost any theoretical framework.

Braun and Clark (2006) offer a six-phase method of thematic analysis. They caution that these steps are not linear, but recursive. In Phase 1 I became familiar with the data. This happened by active reading (and re-reading) data and transcribing each interview myself, paying careful attention to accuracy and consistency with how I punctuated to convey meaning and emphasis. I worked through each transcript at least twice—three times if the participant's interview was especially difficult to transcribe because of an excess of utterances and other "ticks" in how she spoke. Even during this initial phase, I reflected often and took note of potential codes to use later in the analysis process. I kept a list of repeated ideas in a notebook so that I could follow up on these ideas in later interviews. I used the following frameworks to guide my coding: Warren and Mapp's (2011) model; Mediratta, Shah, and McAlister's (2009) Theory of Action;

O'Donnell and Karanja's (2000) Centers' African-centered model; and Laing's (2009) Culture-based Organizing model.

In Phase 2 I began generating initial codes. Codes can be semantic or latent. I used the online platform *Dedoose* to assist me with this process, first dividing each transcript into excerpts, then coding each excerpt semantically. I merged initial codes into theoretical codes in accordance with my frameworks during the second and third rounds of coding. I coded every single excerpt with at least one code so as to ensure that I considered every piece of data before determining whether or not it fit under the larger themes.

In Phase 3 I began searching for themes and in Phase 4 I worked on refining them. A theme "captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of *patterned* response or meaning within the data set" (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 82). In an inductive analysis, themes come from the data, similar to grounded theory. Theoretical thematic analysis utilizes a pre-existing theoretical framework. This results in less richness of the overall body of data (which was not my goal anyway) and instead gives a detailed account of some aspect of the data. In my case, the use of Warren and Mapp's (2011) framework for organizing results in a detailed account of how PEP's work aligns with (or departs from or expands upon) Warren and Mapp's framework. I felt it necessary to use an existing framework with thematic analysis because "a thematic analysis has limited interpretative power beyond mere description if it is not used within an existing theoretical framework that anchors the analytic claims that are made" (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 97). Warren and Mapp's

framework anchors, and thereby gives credibility to the claims that I made about my participants' method of organizing.

As I began to write from these themes, I found that some data fit better than others, and in some cases I had to re-label themes that seemed to work well in theory but did not quite make sense once I attempted to translate them into a narrative. I also found as I began writing that themes I initially had placed to the side did have a place in my analysis.

I identified themes at and beyond the semantic level. During my first round of coding I stayed at the semantic level—coding simply according to the meaning the participants conveyed on the surface. Then I returned to code on the latent level, re-coding in accordance with my theoretical framework. Braun and Clark (2006) state that "for latent thematic analysis, the development of the themes themselves involves interpretative work, and the analysis that is produced is not just description, but is already theorized" (p. 84). In short, I analyzed as I coded, identifying initial semantic codes as examples of aspects of my theoretical framework. This process typically aligns with constructivist paradigms, which allow for theorizing "socio-cultural contexts and structural conditions" (p. 85). Because a study's epistemology determines what a researcher can say about data, I appreciated how these elements aligned here, but also with the culturally centered paradigm which similarly draws on the constructivist tradition.

I worked through Phase 5—defining and naming themes and Phase 6—producing the report, simultaneously. After describing my findings and working through the analysis, I renamed my themes as I gained more insight about what the data showed. I

also drew on other frameworks and began to compare the themes that I developed from Warren and Mapp's framework to other organizing frameworks—Mediratta, Shah, and McAlister's (2009) Theory of Action; O'Donnell and Karanja's (2000) Centers' African-centered model; and Laing's (2009) Culture-based Organizing model. I initially planned to include Alinsky's (1971) method as well. Although several organizations in Mediratta, Shah, and McAlister's work organize in the Alinsky tradition, I found that Alinsky's approach was not consonant with other models because of its emphasis on social class issues (over racial injustice, for instance), the deficit view of the "Have-Nots," and the devaluation of building relationships (Alinsky, 1971; Horton & Freire, 1990; Oakes & Rogers, 2006).

Realizing that this renaming of themes meant that some data no longer fit, I returned to my raw data that I had sorted and coded and some of the original transcripts to incorporate any additional data that would support the analysis. Table 4 shows how my themes compared to the frameworks that I used for this study.

Application

The "final" aspect, Application, considers the applicability of the research project. It also involves the community in determining how to utilize the results. These processes attend to harmony, access, and participation. Applicability is also "a means of attesting to the quality and trustworthiness of qualitative research" (Lyons et al., 2013, p. 19). The Application aspect is most important to me because it is what I wanted to offer Hope when I first approached her with this research idea. Socially just researchers will identify ways for communities to improve their practices. "By arming practitioners with empirically-based recommendations, practitioners are better equipped to successfully

Table 4. *Themes Informed by Organizing/Theoretical Frameworks Used for Analysis*

Framework	Components	Related Themes
Warren & Mapp's model (Warren & Mapp, 2011)	Roots: Shared organizing traditions, histories, identities	Cultural heritage
	"Environment": Opportunities & constraints affecting the work	Analysis
	Trunk: Core processes of building relationships and building power	Awareness/Advocacy
	Branches: Transforming individuals, communities, and institutions	Advocacy/Activism
Theory of Action (Mediratta, Shah, & McAlister, 2009)	Organizational inputs	Cultural heritage
	Community organizing campaigns	Awareness/Advocacy
	Outcomes: Community capacity	Advocacy
	Outcomes: District and school capacity	Advocacy
	Impact: Improved student outcomes	Not addressed/insufficient data
Centers' African-centered model (O'Donnell & Karanja, 2000)	Transformative community practice	Activism
	Purpose: Deepen resident participation and increase capacity to be self-determining	Cultural heritage
	Community practitioner as teacher-leader	Cultural heritage
	Institution building	Advocacy/Activism
	Culture provides the values base, spiritual strength, and shared history to sustain change	Cultural heritage
	Developing strategies to build (low income) community's capital base	Not addressed/not relevant
Culture-based Organizing (Laing, 2009)	Broad definition of community	Cultural heritage
	Broad definition of the scope of community problems	Cultural heritage
	Oratory traditions to raise consciousness	Cultural heritage
	Deconstructing White supremacy and internalized racism	Awareness/Advocacy
	Challenge social structures and power relationships	Advocacy/Activism

advocate for various populations" (Lyons et al., 2013, p. 20). As a praxis-oriented researcher, I wanted to connect community members with resources that could support their work.

Culturally centered, praxis-oriented research develops a plan for dissemination with the community (Trainor & Bal, 2014). I have shared a draft copy of the dissertation with the director. I have created a document that highlights the key findings of the research in a way that the participants can digest more readily. Those who wish to view the full document, however, will have the opportunity to do so.

Summary

I designed this qualitative, culturally centered research study using scholarship from African-centered methodology, social justice research, and culturally responsive/sensitive research. The use of one-on-one interviews placed the participants' experiences at the center of the research, and documents helped to corroborate my findings. Throughout the entire process, from design to implementation, I attended to equity, access, participation, and harmony to develop a research study that will help to inform the community organization's practice.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This chapter presents my findings regarding how the Parent Empowerment Program (PEP) operated after I analyzed the data I collected using these existing community organizing frameworks: Warren & Mapp's model (Warren & Mapp, 2011); Theory of Action model (Mediratta, Shah, & McAlister, 2009); Centers' African-centered model (O'Donnell & Karanja, 2000); and Culture-based Organizing model (Laing, 2009). I identified four themes to organize the findings: awareness, advocacy, analysis, and activism. I begin with evidence of ways the African cultural heritage, which the participants mostly shared, constituted an important foundation for the work of the organization. I use these four themes, awareness, advocacy, analysis, and activism, to answer each of my research questions as I describe the organization's processes, the way it operated and impacts on the parent participants, the community and the schools. The research questions are:

1. What role does the cultural heritage of the participants play in the organization's work?
2. What impacts has the organization had on the participants, community, and on reducing discipline disparities in the school system to date?
3. How did members of the organization work to raise parents' awareness about school discipline reform, and facilitate parents' involvement in culturally sensitive approaches to reducing disparities in school discipline?
4. What factors supported or hindered the organization's work?
5. What can the organization do to improve its efforts in the future?

A summary of the findings is in Table 5.

Table 5. *Summary of Findings*

Research Question	Data Sources	Key Findings	Theme
1. What role does the cultural heritage of the participants play in the organization's work?	Interviews Documents • Application for the "PEP" program • Educational Series flyer • Media advisory • OCR complaint • PEP webpage YouTube video	• Shared organizing tradition (co-founders): Black women in civil rights era • Shared history: education inequity/injustice yielding cultural perspectives and critiques • Shared identity: village consciousness; awareness of agency	(Shared) African American Cultural Heritage
2a. What impacts has the organization had on the participants?	Interviews Documents • Application for the "PEP" program YouTube Video	• General and special education policies • How to interpret the student handbook • School-to-prison pipeline as a systemic issue • Reflecting on personal biases • Working in groups • Ability to advocate: equipped to speak out and find out school-related information	Awareness
3. How did members of the organization work to raise parents' awareness about school discipline reform, and facilitate parents' involvement in culturally sensitive approaches to reducing disparities in school discipline?	Interviews Documents • PBIS matrix	• Taught about PBIS at community events • Providing strategies for home • Taught parents how to navigate school system and removed leeriness • Building social/political capital (power): Becoming "famous" • Developed restorative justice programs • Responding to parents' needs and building a support group	Advocacy

2b. And what was the impact on the community?		• Providing tools • Sharing experiences, learning new approaches, gaining confidence • Increased number of people reached through projects	
4. What factors supported or hindered the organization's work?	Interviews Documents • Local news reports	• Resistance • Bullying and fear in schools • Building trust	Analysis
5. What can the organization do to improve its efforts in the future?	Interviews	• Engaging the graduates • A consistent presence	Activism

Is the African American Cultural Heritage the Participants Shared Relevant to this Work?

Shared Organizing Traditions with the Civil Rights Movement

At the root of community organizing are shared organizing traditions, shared histories, and shared identities (Warren & Mapp, 2011). These commonalities lay the foundation for a group's community organizing work. The PEP co-founders had a common experience of organizing in the tradition of Black women's participation in the African American civil rights movement. In this tradition, the co-founders privileged the information and knowledge among members of the community and made decisions with them collectively. For instance, the Dunham County Parents against Push-out Program (DCP3) began after a year of meeting and building relationships with members of the community. As members of DCP3, the PEP co-founders and other members of the community shared information and knowledge with one another about their experiences with the district's school discipline policies and they made a collective decision about the

action that they wanted to take to address the disparities in school discipline in the district. They also partnered with other organizations, including churches, to host events in the community to raise awareness about the school-to-prison pipeline (Media Advisory: Community Conversation Event document, 2011). Also in the tradition of Black women organizing, the co-founders educated and trained community members about the school-to-prison pipeline (Educational Series flyer document, n.d.). They taught parents about the school district's student handbook, which outlines the district's disciplinary policies. They also taught parents how to intervene early to prevent disciplinary consequences from occurring. The co-founders realized that the more they taught parents in the community about how to advocate for themselves and their children, the less those parents relied on DCP3. Further, they found that the parents began advocating for other people's children. In short, the parents in Dunham County began to lead themselves, which Hope recalled "was powerful" to the co-founders. This finding led the co-founders to form the Parent Empowerment Program (PEP), in the ethos of the civil rights tradition of developing indigenous community leaders.

Shared History: Cultural Perspectives and Critiques Rooted in Shared Experiences of Educational Inequity and Injustice

One of the interesting characteristics of the participants who joined PEP was that they each had a shared history of witnessing inequities and injustices in how their children and other children in the community experienced school. Consequently, the participants shared cultural perspectives of what schooling should look like for their children and other children in the community. Melia, Robin, and Shelby recognized that schooling was not meaningful, culturally affirming, or academically stimulating for

children. Shelby also identified racially inscribed injustices in testing policies. Shannon and Hope saw racial injustice in how the schools criminalized their African American sons over their appearance.

Melia and Robin recognized that part of the reason why children have challenges in school is because school is not meaningful for them. Melia, whose son Keymon was bright enough to do the work in school but still chose not to do it, believed that it is hard to keep boys engaged and wanting to go to school. She believed that "the average little boy if he had a chance to not go to school, he probably wouldn't." Robin believed that "kids love to learn and they want to learn," but the discipline problems lie in "how they're being taught and what they're being taught." She insisted, "If teachers knew how to connect with the kids you wouldn't have as many discipline problems." Robin went on to describe the type of curriculum that would help teachers connect with children, particularly for African American students:

> African American children…I think they should be taught about their history more than one week out of the year. For the whole year we have Black history or we have Black history month, but we're Black 365 days of the year. The whole time they're in school, they're taught one week about Black history; they're taught about slavery. There's more to us than just slavery. But they're taught mainly the negative about slavery and about Black people and I feel like it needs to be a balance. There's Black people that did great things also from back in the day, way before. All we're taught is about Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks. That's important, but there's more to us than them.

Robin suggested that African American children learn about their history from "way before," prior to the civil rights era or the period of African enslavement in the U.S. She was also highly critical of the ways in which African American children are compared to children from other cultures, especially when schools fail to teach African American children in accordance with their culture. She continued,

> I was [at work] tutoring a second grade Black girl and here she is having to learn Chinese. And I'm thinking okay, I know the Asians' [test scores] are up at the top, but our kids ain't Asian...When we're taught according to our culture, we can excel just like the Asians and anybody else, and I feel like we keep being compared to Asians and Whites. It's like, why aren't we learning our own language? Here she is [in the] second grade being forced to learn Chinese. What about us? What's our history? What's our language?

Parents also identified testing requirements as robbing children of meaningful, academically stimulating schooling experiences. Robin described schooling as "fear-based" and in conflict with the purposes of schooling:

> A lot of the issues that I find going on now, our kids are being taught out of fear. Their learning is fear-based; their teaching is fear-based. I mean when I have to get on my bus when it's time to take the CRCT, all I'm hearing from elementary on up [is] "Oh I'm afraid; I don't wanna fail the test." That's not what school should ever have been about.

Shelby also felt that testing was hurting students. She mentioned that she would like to see testing policies change because of the pressure that they placed on the students:

> I would like to see some of the testing policies changed…My son has anxiety and when those teachers start ramping up for the tests, I mean he practically can't go to school 'cause he's so nervous. And a lot of kids are like that. I went to the middle school to help out and I saw a couple of my son's friends and they're in the 8th grade. And I was like, well how are you doing? And he's like, "I'm so stressed out! We've got tests!" I was like wow; you're only in the 8th grade.

The sheer number of tests that students had to take raised concerns for Shelby, and she also disapproved of the district's disparity in setting testing goals. She noted that the goals for Black and Hispanic children were lower than those for White and Asian students, and that special education students had no goals at all. These disparate achievement goals result from legislation that the state legislature passed several years ago (Office for Civil Rights [OCR] Complaint document, 2011).[6]

Finally, parents identified racial injustice with how their sons were treated in school. Shannon, a married mother of two middle school children, believed that some of the unfair treatment that her son received from teachers was because of his appearance and personality. "His personality is very outgoing," Shannon said of her son Jabari. "He's very tall, he has somewhat of a wild and unruly afro, and he looks older than he is." Shannon was critical of the ways in which the district handled disciplinary

---

[6] These disparate achievement goals result from legislation that the state legislature passed several years ago. In short, academic achievement goals differ for students from certain racial/ethnic backgrounds, English language learners (ELL), and students with disabilities. DCP3 has been particularly vocal about how these policies exclude ELLs and students with disabilities from meeting the same academic standards as their White and Asian non-disabled peers in particular. They insist that the state department of education change its testing targets for ELLs and students with disabilities, citing violations of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), No Child Left Behind, and the Americans with Disabilities Act. Source: DCP3's OCR Complaint document, 2011.

infractions, insisting, "way before any type of…suspension happens, parents should definitely be involved; they should be called." Shannon believed that she should be the first one to address her children's disciplinary problems, stating, "I don't ask the teachers to handle it. I ask them to contact me, if there's a problem."

Like Jabari, Hope's son Jason was often targeted because of his appearance. After coming to school in a red Ralph Lauren polo shirt and a doo-rag[7] in his pocket, Jason was "plucked" out of his Advanced Placement class and placed in In-School Suspension because school officials deemed his attire gang related. Hope was outraged that the school would remove her son from the learning environment over a dress code concern but would still allow him to return in the evening to play on the football field. To her, the racial implications were clear. Hope took the school district to court, and won on most of the counts that were in her case. "They won a few points," Hope recalled of the court settlement, "but at the end of the day, they had to rectify their policy to stop all that subjective nonsense over a dress code any less."

Shared Identity: Displays of Collective Responsibility

Village consciousness.

Eventually, through the work of the organization the participants deepened a shared identity, which can be described as a village consciousness. In this section, I discuss ways in which participants demonstrated this village consciousness. Because the group's program and ways of working rest on this foundational concept, everyone who joins PEP must show, either in their application or during the application interview, a

[7] A doo-rag (or do-rag) is a cloth worn to protect one's hairstyle, particularly in the African American community. African American males will often place the doo-rag in a pants pocket and let part of it hang out so that it is visible to others.

desire to advocate for change on behalf of the community (Application for "PEP" document, 2013). Hope described the selection criteria to participate in PEP as follows:

> We're looking for somebody who's ready to take that step away from just advocating for their own child and advocating for others. And that's really the big point that we're looking for because we don't want the information to stay with the participant. We want it to go to people who understand there's a bigger issue. And in some cases we've even gotten parents who've had no issues with their own children but have watched what's going on with kids around them, which is even more impactful.

One PEP graduate described the program as "more of a village concept, that everybody needs to take a part" in supporting children in the community ("PEP" YouTube video, 2013). This aspect of the participants' identities was a requirement for participation in PEP and therefore important for PEP's organizing work. Given this requirement, it becomes apparent why each participant demonstrated a collective ethos reflected in the African proverb "it takes a village to raise a child."

Adele, a married mother of two adult daughters, did not have any particular challenges with her children. Her passion for disciplinary reform, particularly for African American boys, stemmed from her interactions with her nephews and the youth in her church. She shared,

> I am very involved in my children's education and they have actually gone on to college and so now I have just a little bit more time to give back, especially because there was a village there for my children. And so I just feel like I have an ample amount of time to give back to the community.

Adele recognized the importance of a "village" to support parents in raising their children and spoke repeatedly about its importance in raising her own children. For her children, she determined that "the village came out of the church, also from the community, and our neighborhood." In fact, Adele chose to live in Dunham County because she believed it would be easier to form a village there than in the city. When she noticed challenges with her nephew and a lack of support in the family for him, she realized, "we really need to step in and really be a part of that village." Adele desired to replicate that village for other children in her biological family as well as her church family.

In many ways, Leslie also demonstrated a responsibility for children in the community through her work in youth development. She managed programs in an after school Kids Klub that developed children's social and life skills. When I asked her why she chose to work with children, she said that she considered teaching, but felt that life skills and social skills were just as important as academics. She continued:

> [Working with kids has] just always been something that I was good at and I've always just had that ability to be able to connect with them in a way that, again not having kids, that, we just connect. We can talk, give advice, and I just like the fact that I have an opportunity to impact somebody for the rest of their life.

Leslie's position as a youth advocate in an after school program placed her at the intersection of the village at school and the village at home. She brought a perspective to PEP that bridged the gap between what needed to be done at school and what could be done at home to support children and families facing disciplinary challenges. She described herself as an "outsider" because she was not a parent, but still she recognized that the parents in the Kids Klub could use some support. So in that vein, she shared the

responsibility of helping children make wise behavioral decisions and being part of the village that supported parents with their children.

Robin, a divorced mother of two adult daughters and one son in high school, demonstrated her commitment to being part of a village in her job as a school bus driver. When the children on her bus received their report cards, she would give treats or simply say "good job" to children who had A's and B's. She believed that her actions would encourage other children to try harder to bring up their grades as well. Robin went on to tell me about a child who she believed was being "failed forward."

> Well, one young lady showed me her progress report and on there it said she had an A. And then the teacher put up under there "needs tutorial help." And so I asked her, I said "why do you need tutorial help if you have an A?" And she said "Ms. [R]—" they call me Ms. [R]. "I don't have a clue what I'm doing. She gave me an A for effort." When she told me that, the very next day I went to the principal, Mr. [Archer]. I expressed to him what this student had said to me…I didn't want to get the teacher in trouble, but to me, that let me know the kids were being failed forward.

Robin felt that she had every right to approach the principal about the way a child was being graded. Even though this was not her child, for Robin, this was a child in her village.

Tina, a married homemaker raising two children, believed that not enough people cared about how special education policies contributed to the school-to-prison pipeline. She remarked,

> I realized that very few people actually know about it because when I try to give a talk and reach out in my community I found like, people are even more clueless than I am. And also not concerned. Not doing anything about it. As long as it's not their child it doesn't affect them.

Tina demonstrated a sense of responsibility for increasing awareness about the need for discipline reform, and saw apathy among others as problematic.

Shelby, a married mother with two boys in special education, also showed concerns about apathy in her community. She remarked:

> And I think it's interesting, too, just by race, if I talk to other people say in my school, who are not having children who are having discipline problems, or are in special ed, as soon as you start to talk about push out or discipline problems, they just, they're gone; they're glazed over. "That don't affect me." "I'm outta here." So, I think we have to get that cross over, too, and let those people know that they're not the only people in the school and whatever happens to any group in the school is gonna affect the total. And everybody needs to get involved. If your child is not in special ed, special ed policies still affect what's going on.

Shelby demonstrated a sense of collectivism when she talked about how we all need to care about what is going on with things like discipline and special education because the decisions that schools and policymakers make affect the entire community.

Importantly, neither Tina nor Shelby is African American. Still, although Shelby identified as White, she did not hold a (purely) mainstream worldview, characterized by individualism and competition. Neither White nor African American, those who share Tina's cultural heritage tend to hold a worldview that balances collectivism and

individualism.[8] Both Tina and Shelby departed from the worldview of those in their communities, who were unconcerned about policies affecting any children other than their own—especially if they were children of color or in special education.

Two of the participants took their sense of community responsibility even further and began the work of forming nonprofit organizations to support children. After Melia's only son Keymon, now deceased, got involved in the juvenile justice system as an adolescent, the juvenile justice administration recruited Melia's involvement as a volunteer. She served as a diversion panel[9] member for about five years and became connected to a number of parents. When some of the parents raised concerns about the effectiveness of the diversion programs in helping to change children's behavior, she began a mentoring program for detained youth.

Melanie, a single mother with four sons, became an advocate for children in her community as a result of becoming more involved in her own children's lives. As a result of this increased involvement, she noticed other children in need of attention and guidance. In fact, she said that children would often approach her and share what often seemed to Melanie like way too much information. In her observations of children who were sent to the alternative school, she concluded:

> So by me just talking to them, just talking to them 'cause I wanted to keep an eye out on my kids, I kinda realized that hmm, somebody needs to be helping these kids out.

---

[8] The indigenous cultural worldview the participants shared is influenced by multiple other cultural traditions.

[9] A diversion panel manages juvenile offenders without going to court.

This realization led Melanie to become more involved in the after school program that her boys attended. In an effort to meet the needs of girls, who Melanie seemed to attract effortlessly, she and her sister started a mentoring program for girls between grades 3-12.

Awareness of agency.

The participants' awareness of agency deepened their shared identity. All of the participants were involved in the community before joining PEP. As they became more involved in PEP, however, the participants became more aware of their ability to act on behalf of children in their community. For instance, in spite of participating in other training programs, Tina did not feel qualified to participate as an advocate in Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings until after graduating from PEP. Melanie, who was highly involved in the community before PEP said that participating in the program "makes you actually wanna be more involved." In short, the participants' shared identities deepened as a result of their work. In the next section, I discuss in detail how PEP transformed the individual participants.

So is the cultural heritage of the participants relevant to the organization's work? Indeed, it informed the foundation of the organization and as I will show throughout this chapter, it permeated PEP's core organizing processes. The co-founders formed PEP in the organizing tradition of African American women in the civil rights era and only invited those who shared a cultural identity—a village consciousness—to become part of the organization. The cultural heritage set the purpose for the participants' advocacy. The participants shared a history of witnessing education inequity and injustice. Not only did participants determine that schools were failing to provide a meaningful, culturally affirming learning experience, the school district implemented racist policies and

practices. The parents were critical of the ways in which the district set testing goals by race and ability and in how schools meted disciplinary consequences based on students' race and appearance. Finally, the participants' shared worldview compelled them to take responsibility for filling in the gaps in the village. Their increasing awareness of agency—their ability to act on behalf of children in the community—deepened their shared identity as part of the village.

What Impacts Has the Parent Empowerment Program Had on the Participants' Awareness?

Changing the ways in which schools teach and test children in Dunham County was beyond the scope of PEP's work, but the participants ultimately learned how to advocate for changes to the ways in which schools handled discipline. This ability began with a new awareness—a consciousness of the destructive nature of disciplinary policies and information about culturally sensitive alternatives to reduce disparities. Nearly every parent expressed an increase in knowledge and critical awareness as a result of participating in PEP. The monthly Saturday training sessions gave participants a foundation from which to develop and implement their community projects. This foundation included both knowledge and a deeper consciousness of their ability to make changes in their community. The participants learned specific information each month that: increased their knowledge of school discipline policies and how to interpret the district's student handbook; increased their knowledge of special education policies; and explained how the school-to-prison pipeline functions as a systemic issue. Through cultural diversity training and working collaboratively in groups, participants developed a greater awareness of themselves and how to work with others on their community project

teams. Finally, the training and experiences in PEP prepared the participants for advocacy by teaching them how to find school-related information (e.g. discipline data) and how to communicate with educational leaders.

Learning to Interpret the School Handbook

Some of the parents agreed that participating in PEP motivated them to pay more attention to the information that the school sent home. During one of PEP's training sessions, the participants learned how to interpret what was written in the school handbook. Understanding the handbook seemed to affect Robin in particular because of her son's attendance challenges. It was not until she read the handbook that she realized that attendance could affect other privileges, such as getting a driving license. Shelby knew that the handbook was available to her, but she—and several others—had never bothered to read it. Although I felt my next question had an obvious answer, I asked her why she never bothered to read the handbook.

> Shelby: Well, and maybe I'm wrong here, but it's available on the website. And I think they hand it out, right? The beginning of school? And you have to sign for it and everything. Well, on orientation day I get two stacks of paper this high with all kind of "Sign! Sign! Sign! Sign! Sign!" And it just looks so cumbersome. Like, you know, when you go to sign something on the Internet, like "yes, yes, I do, I do. Whatever you say." They could be taking your house; it doesn't matter.
>
> Me: Yeah, yeah.
>
> Shelby: So I think that's the main thing. I think when you go into the school year, you just don't think things are gonna happen. You don't wanna read about those

things. And it just seems like, well the school's looking out for the kids. That's what you think. They're looking out for them so I'm sure their policy's good.

Shelby's statement reveals the perception that other participants had about schools—parents trusted the schools to treat their children fairly. PEP shook the core of that belief.

Increased Awareness of Special Education Policies

The policies and practices affecting special education students were a shock to some of the participants, particularly to Shelby as the parent of children in special education and Tina who worked as an advocate for children in special education. Manifestation determination regulations are supposed to protect special education students from lengthy suspensions when the misbehavior is a result of their disability. In spite of her involvement in the district, Shelby had never heard of a manifestation determination. She found it ironic that she could have two children in special education but never been told about manifestation until participating in PEP. Tina always assumed that "the special needs kids would be protected and supported more than the general peers." When she learned that the school system often inflicted the same consequences on special education students as general education students, she said it was eye opening.

Becoming Aware of the School to Prison Pipeline as a Systemic Issue

Robin, Shelby, Tina, and Melia articulated an understanding of the school-to-prison pipeline as a systemic issue. Robin understood the role that policy played in some of these inequities. She said PEP "helped me to understand from a political standpoint, how embedded the policies are that are working against our kids." PEP has helped Shelby to recognize the "injustices that are going on in our own neighborhoods that we don't even know about." Tina remarked that she had never heard of the school-to-prison

pipeline before PEP and she was unaware that so many children were pushed into alternative schools.

Melia's story was most intriguing to me because she was intimately acquainted with the juvenile justice system. Her son was often in trouble, had spent time on house arrest, and attended an alternative school. Melia was a volunteer working with the diversion program, reviewing cases that came before the juvenile court. Yet she had no idea that the school-to-prison pipeline existed. She confessed,

> I had no clue. I really felt… that [the juvenile justice system] had a vested interest. But then when I learned about how vested they're not, the way that we need them to be vested, I think they were looking more for people who fit their program, meaning [the] juvenile justice system, versus people who wanted to shape and tailor them to understand us with what we're going through. So yeah, I was clueless…plus my son was just, I mean he was off the chain. I really couldn't defend him with anything [laughs] so I don't feel like the school pushed him out, he pushed himself out until he came to his senses and realized "I really messed up."

Melia initially thought that the juvenile justice system was interested in her son's well being, and the well being of other children as well. She later realized that the court system was looking for people to support its work, but not necessarily to support the families affected by school push out. Although she felt that her son was mostly deserving of what happened to him because of his behavior, Melia never fully understood how schools were pushing children out until she got involved in PEP.

"Can't Keep it Inside": Learning about Personal Biases

Hope recognized that interpersonal and intrapersonal skills were an important component in advocacy training and sessions that developed such skills appeared throughout the course of the nine months. During one of these sessions, Courtney, a workshop facilitator for PEP, led the participants to examine how they perceived a variety of groups of people, such as "White males, females, African Americans, Jews, rich [people], and so on." Courtney believed that the session benefitted all people regardless of "race, color, background, or creed" because so many prejudices have been "normalized and internalized." This session forced Adele to reconsider how she viewed the young men in her church in particular, and people that were different from her in general. She described how this session affected her:

> I walked out feeling embarrassed of all the negativity that I thought of when [Courtney] challenged us with when we look at a group [of people] what do we think of. Oh my goodness; why couldn't I [have] just stayed on the positive side? Why did I have to go first with this long laundry list on the negative side? 'Cause I had a choice, and I chose the negative information [versus] the positive information. That put a whole different spin on my life, and it was like whoa—this stuff is good. This is thought-provoking information that I can't just keep inside.

Adele further explained that the session brought out the negative stereotypes that she agreed to concerning different groups of people. She did not realize that she harbored these feelings toward others and it troubled her deeply. As a result of this experience, she changed her approach with the young men in her church. Adele said that when she

encounters a young man who appears to be angry, for example, she could be misinterpreting what she sees. Instead of making assumptions and asking "why you looking so mad, or angry?" she can instead ask him, "What's on your mind?" Adele suggested that the second question removes the judgment and assumption embedded in the first question and could facilitate a dialogue between Adele and the young man. Adele insisted,

> You have a choice in how you say things, how you think about things, so everything that you think, you don't have to actually say that right away. You can have a pause moment and flip that, especially if it's negative. And I'm not trying to be negative.

For Adele, just taking a moment to reflect on the approach could change a negative situation into a positive one.

Learning to Work Together

The PEP participants belonged to one of four groups working on various projects: a first- and second-year Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) team and a first- and second-year restorative justice (RJ) team (see Table 6).[10] Although all of the teams developed skills, and particularly during the second year they began forming relationships in the community, the challenges of learning to work with a group of people affected all of the groups, with some more negatively impacted than others. Generally, Hope assigned each participant to work in a specific school zone that was the same as, or close to, the participant's own school zone. She utilized this strategy so that each group could impact a particular community (Application for "PEP" document, 2013). In order

[10] During the first year, PEP had a third project team focusing on PBIS or RJ but no one from that team responded to my request to participate in this study.

Table 6. *Summary of Research Participants from the Parent Empowerment Program*

Cohort	**First-Year Cohort**		**Second-Year Cohort**	
Project Topic	Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)	Restorative Justice (RJ)	Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)	Restorative Justice (RJ)
Team Members	Robin	Melia	Adele	Leslie
	Tina	Shelby	Shannon	Melanie

to commit to make an impact in a school zone, participants had to also commit to the organization and to each other. Maintaining this commitment proved challenging at some point for all of the teams. Other challenges included a lack of communication and clashing personalities.

The first-year PBIS team started off well with five people. By the end of the year, only Tina and Robin remained. Tina described a third remaining member as "a pretty inactive member." Tina stated, "we still put her name on the final report but it was me and her, me and [Robin] who finished."

Communication issues within the group and with the leadership hindered the PBIS project's development. The guidelines for the project were unclear to the parents so the group lost a lot of time just trying to get an understanding of what they were supposed to be doing. Then the venue of the project kept changing, from an elementary school, to a church, to a high school. The group lost one member after the elementary school that she suggested fell through, although she never clearly communicated her reason for leaving. Tina believed that the group dynamics could have been improved if the parents had communicated more. There were a lot of different opinions and ideas, but people did not effectively communicate with one another. She also believed that grouping people according to personality as opposed to geography would have been a

better idea because, Tina argued, “most of the project can be done by a group by not physically meeting.” Tina stated “knowing and learning what we know now” about how to approach the projects, the program “could have been done better definitely.”

Tina attributed her relationship with Robin and her desire to produce a quality product as the reasons why they were able to finish the project. “I think me and Robin just hit it off,” Tina remarked. “Otherwise this project would not have, we would not have completed our project.” Tina and Robin understood each other and were both committed to a quality project. “We wanted to complete this,” she added. “We wanted to do as much as we could and do it well. So that kind of a focus is very important and I’m glad that she was with me and she supported me; I supported her.”

The dynamics of the second-year PBIS team were much more harmonious, with the exception of one group member. Although Shannon and Adele never identified this member by name, I will refer to her as Anne. According to Adele, Anne suffered from insecurities about her level of education. (When Shannon described Anne, she explicitly stated “I don’t want to use the word ‘insecurity’…” as if to say the problem was akin to an insecurity or feeling of inadequacy.) As the group worked on the project and prepared for the final presentation, Anne increasingly showed discomfort with participating. Adele said that the group offered Anne multiple ways to be involved. At each level of potential involvement, Anne was uncomfortable. Shannon recalled, “The person basically continued to say they were going to do certain things and they didn’t do the things.” Eventually they reached a point where they allowed Anne to opt out of doing anything except to advance the PowerPoint presentation slides while the rest of the group

presented the content. Adele remarked, "Then I guess she felt that that wasn't enough and we were at the end [of the program]."

Although Anne's discomfort led her to break her commitment to the group, Shannon and Adele contended that they never broke their commitment to Anne, or to having her be a part of the group. Adele said that because Anne was part of the team, they could never intentionally exclude her. She insisted:

> Because I believe that the teams were put together to work together. So you just could not exclude them as a team because that's like a group of people, that's bullying almost…I would, personally, I would never do that to a person.

Even after the second-year PEP class ended, Shannon shared that the group continued to invite Anne to participate in projects in the community "because that person is still part of the team." Both Adele and Shannon responded to Anne in a way that aligns with the African American cultural worldview. The team was a unit, not just a collection of individuals. For Adele and Shannon, Anne would always be a part of that unit.

Shannon learned from her group members and from the PEP training on restorative practices about how to work with challenging people. She shared,

> The classes on forgiveness, and restitution…it was amazing…I actually got to see that demonstrated…how one person in the group who…seemed to not be moving forward in the group and seeing other people support that person in a way that you actually see restitution and forgiveness demonstrated. I thought that was just truly awesome…So I've learned how to deal with difficult people just basically from watching different members of my group, how they handled that situation with that person.

Although Anne was not receptive, the use of restorative practices was a culturally sensitive approach to resolving conflict in the group.

Working with Anne was a challenge, but the remaining four members of the second-year PBIS group got along well. Shannon attributed some of this to their personality colors. At the retreat where the PEP program kicked off each August, each participant took a personality color test. All of the members of the second-year PBIS team identified as having a "blue" personality, but Anne was orange. Shannon recalled the trainer for that session stating that those with a blue personality acted "more so on feelings and intuition versus facts." The trainer also told Shannon that the person with the orange personality, "who based a lot of things on facts and factual information will find you all somewhat frustrating." Shannon believed that having someone with an orange personality was helpful for a group because that person could ensure the accuracy of information. For some reason that is still somewhat elusive to the group, Anne just seemed incompatible with the other four parents. Although the team continued to reach out to Anne and find ways to work with her, she remained distant. Shannon believed that the group treated her fairly, and they each tried working with her collectively and individually. Still, Shannon also recognized that "you could provide opportunities for other people and provide a situation for them, but you know there's just some people that are not going to participate or fully embrace what you're trying to do."

Adele made no mention of personality colors as contributing to the group's disharmony, but instead believed that the group worked well together because "they came in stating where their strengths were, where their weaknesses were, and identified them." The group members said upfront whether or not they wanted to be involved in public

speaking, or organizing, or taking notes, or other roles that the group needed. With the exception of the challenges with Anne, Adele described the process of working together as fairly intuitive:

> Because we had different skill sets, a lot of things fell in place. And that was what was, I found so interesting about our group is that we literally had people who gravitated towards their skill set…We had organizers. We had people that dealt with the event planning type of it, what the room would aesthetically look like. The agenda, the slide, all of those things, we had people that rolled into their place.

By responding to one another intuitively, Adele and Shannon's group displayed ways of knowing informed by their cultural heritage and experiences. Having people "roll into place" and harmonious personalities left this second-year PBIS team with four of the original five members still actively involved. Unlike the first-year PBIS team, all but one member remained committed to the organization and to each other, and the relationships have even endured beyond graduation from the program.

Like the first-year PBIS group, the first-year restorative justice (RJ) group struggled through not clearly understanding their project and with members holding differences of opinion. They lost all but two of their members over the course of the year. One member was just there to audit PEP as an organization and was not actively involved in the group projects. Although Shelby thought that everyone was excited in the beginning, she believed that the time requirement and the absence of consequences for failing to complete the program affected her group. She explained:

> There was a lack of being graded, or it wouldn't cost us anything basically if we did not do it, you know what I mean? So we weren't gonna get in trouble, or we weren't gonna lose money, or it wasn't to get a job, so I think people just weren't that invested in the project.

Shelby guessed that if people were able to choose their projects that they may be more committed to them. Melia recognized that some projects were a better fit for some participants. Regardless, both women believed that their final project would have been much better had people simply remained committed to the group that they were assigned. Shelby believed that developing strong relationships with one another could have buffered against the unraveling of the group:

> I think if we could have known each other a little bit better, trusted each other, gotten to really know each other's strengths and weaknesses, I think we would've done better. And just to make us more accountable to the other people. If there's too many people in the group then it's just like "oh well, they won't even notice that I didn't do it or that I didn't show up" or whatever. But if you only have two or three people and you're committed to them and they're counting on you, then I think you're a little bit more inclined to do the work and show up and be there.

The relationships in this group did not remain after the PEP graduation. Shelby followed a few of her former team members on Facebook, and occasionally saw one former member in the community, but otherwise she did not maintain any relationships with the group.

Like the second-year PBIS group, the second-year RJ group fared better than its predecessor. This group was unique because the participants were all members of the

Kids Klub parent board, so they already had a working relationship. Unlike the other three groups, all of the participants remained for the duration of the program, although, according to Leslie, two of the parents were not as committed as before. Leslie was not sure if this was because of personal issues or because they underestimated the amount of time that PEP required. Being in relationship with each other before PEP was helpful, but working on their project as members of PEP accentuated some personality conflicts. Leslie described it as having too many "chiefs," or leaders in the group:

> We had a lot of chiefs…I saw that it was oftentimes a lot of pulling, and a lot of disagreement. But once we could decide on everybody's individual responsibilities, we worked fine. But if we ever had to come together and do something together, it was a bit challenging.

Robin, who served as the group's mentor noticed these challenges but she also noticed that the group managed to come together in the end. Even in the midst of the challenging work, Leslie pointed to evidence of strength in the group. When it came to planning each week's session, Leslie said that the group was "just very in tune" with each other. They planned out who was responsible for each session ahead of time but the content developed progressively. "So it wasn't something that we had specific dialogue about," Leslie said, "it just kind of happened, but it was all based off the previous week and then we discussed what we were gonna do." Additionally, Hope believed that the Kids Klub group was the ideal group because the members "had worked together already on a concerted level, on a longer term basis, and so they knew each other's personalities." Unlike the other groups that contacted her when there was conflict, the Kids Klub group

never reached out to Hope to assist with group challenges; they resolved them among themselves.

Overall, Hope recognized that getting people to work together is challenging. She did try to prepare the parents for collaborative work but in reality, the parents simply had to go through the process of learning to work together. She explained:

> We do a section of training on it but having been through a few trainings on group dynamics, I can honestly say I don't care how many trainings you put people through, you really do have to go through some process of working with a group and then if it's a group that's gonna be around for a long time, then you start to learn to work within those personalities and when to just ignore people, when to push them and all of that. The program is long enough that I think they can get a sense of it. And for the ones who really have the issues within the group over dynamics, personality conflicts, I think it's just long enough to say, "okay I think I can put up with you just that long and then I'm out!" [laughs]

During the first year of PEP, many of the parent members chose not to "put up" with each other for the sake of the project and never learned to work together. Those who remained, however, at least learned how not to approach this type of work in the future. For instance, Tina acknowledged that as a result of "knowing and learning" from this experience things could have been done better. She also surmised that personalities were more important than geography in selecting teammates. Tina, Shannon, and Shelby expressed how important relationships were to the groups' ability to work effectively. Shannon's group learned to apply some of the culturally relevant PEP training on restitution and forgiveness to challenging situations that they faced with Anne. Both of

the second-year teams learned to work intuitively, in accordance with their cultural heritage, by respecting each other's strengths and weaknesses, which Shelby argued could have helped her first-year team to work more effectively.

Equipped to Speak Out and Find Out School-Related Information

As a result of the intensive training and time spent working on project teams, the participants gained awareness of how to advocate for school discipline reform. Robin, Adele, Shannon, Leslie, and Tina each expressed that they learned how to find information and how to use information to communicate with educational leaders or to educate others in their community. Observing the results of parents learning new information and sharing it with others prompted the co-founders to develop PEP. This awareness is a key part of the work of the organization.

Robin credited PEP with helping her to "find her voice" and knowing on what to voice her opinion. She said that PEP gave her a voice as a parent and as an advocate. When I asked what PEP did to help her find her voice, Robin replied that they gave her the information that she needed and helped her "to understand the workings of the educational system from the inside, from the political side, from the legislative side." Robin advocated not just for other parents, but also for children and teachers. In fact, at the end of our first interview, Robin took out a recorder and interviewed *me* so that she could have a better understanding of my perspective as a teacher.

Adele believed that her PBIS group felt much more equipped to approach educational leaders as a result of going through PEP. Shannon made the following similar observation:

> I think I have more confidence to speak to [leadership] now, because I think that before I didn't know like how to look up information; like I know now that I can go to open records and find out. I don't have to rely on the school to tell me actually what they're doing…It's all public information.

Shannon felt that once she knew how to get information to support her case, she could present an argument to public officials or administrators at her children's school. In fact, Shannon went to the administrator at her children's school and questioned him about not having the PBIS program. Although the administrator had not yet given a satisfactory response to this request, Shannon became confident in her ability to raise issues with the leaders in her children's school. One PEP graduate gained the confidence to keep pressing if she is not receiving the answers she wants. She said to start by going through the proper channels but "if the channels in the school are not working…who's to say you can't talk to the governor…there is no stopping [how far you can go]" ("PEP" YouTube video, 2013).

Leslie learned where to go to find information that she needed to advocate on behalf of her students. Leslie identified "good networks" as one of the benefits of PEP to help her be a better advocate. Tina's work as a parent advocate improved as a result of PEP. Further, it was after graduating from PEP when she felt that she was fully prepared to advocate on behalf of other children. Tina said the following about her involvement with PEP:

> It has made me understand the challenges much better and it has opened up my ideas and my support for the Positive Behavior Interventions because before that I did not even know what was it and how it can impact, especially the middle

school and the high school kids, and with the behavior issues so, it's been a very, very enriching experience all over, and I'm very, very grateful for that.

The impacts that PEP had on the participants include multiple learning experiences to raise their awareness. The participants learned about general and special education policies, and how to read and interpret the student handbook. The participants learned that the challenges with discipline that they have observed with their own children and other children in the community are not isolated cases, but rather are systemic and result from embedded policies and practices in the school district. The monthly training sessions provided the participants with new information and expanded their knowledge of their own personal biases. The culturally relevant sessions on forgiveness and restitution prepared at least one group for the challenges of working with a new group of people. Each of the second-year teams overcame challenging group dynamics by relating to each other intuitively, in accordance with their cultural heritage. For other groups that did not necessarily learn how to work collaboratively, they at least identified what could have been done differently, which is a valuable type of awareness as well. Finally, learning how to locate information and developing public speaking skills prepared the participants to speak with education leaders and to further their advocacy efforts.

How Did Members of the Parent Empowerment Program Engage in Advocacy to Raise Parents' Awareness About School Discipline Reform (Including Culturally Sensitive Approaches) and What Was the Impact on the Community?

Equipped with an awareness of education policies and an understanding of the systemic nature of the school-to-prison pipeline, the PEP participants entered the

community to teach other parents about what they had learned. PEP's Saturday trainings gave parents a number of tools to use and a wealth of information to support their work in the community. When participants began their community projects, they focused primarily on either Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) or restorative justice (RJ). The first-year PBIS teams advocated for the use of PBIS in the schools and provided resources for the parents and students who attended the workshop. The second-year team advocated for its use both at school and at home at four different community events. The first-year RJ team developed a guide to implement their project in the community. The second-year RJ team transformed into a parent support group. The four teams advocated for alternatives to exclusionary discipline through presentations, conversations, sharing stories, and providing resources. They led parents in the community to greater awareness and increased confidence to advocate on behalf of their children. The connections that the participants made in the community allowed for the building of social and political capital for the organization.

Teaching about PBIS

Two groups during the first year of PEP and one group during the second year were given the task of developing and implementing a project related to PBIS. Robin and Tina were members of the first-year PBIS team. Their group worked with Ms. Jamie, a parent coordinator from Union High School in Zone 1. The goal of the project was to reach out to parents of students who were "at risk" because of tardies and discipline referrals. The group decided to use fliers to advertise during a January high school basketball game. The actual workshop was held at the school on a Tuesday evening in February. About ten people attended, including students and parents. During the

workshop, Robin presented on PBIS and discussed the importance of giving children a chance to correct their behavior in a positive way.

Although there was a small turnout, Robin believed that an impact was made on those who attended. When I asked her how she knew that an impact was made she replied, "Just by how they responded. They were very appreciative of the information given, not just with PBIS but even with what [PEP] was offering also." Tina agreed and said "It was very positive; [the attendees] were very encouraged." Tina shared that although it was a small group, it was very interactive. The students who were present shared stories about their difficulties in school. These difficulties seemed to be especially pronounced for families who had recently moved to the state. Robin was particularly familiar with the challenges associated with moving across state lines so she was able to speak to the family's concerns. The PBIS team gave the attendees resources to help support the student's adjustment.

Because the first-year PBIS project built upon Ms. Jamie's work at Union High School, it did not make a huge impact as far as reaching a new audience or introducing the school to a new set of ideas. The group had struggled to develop an innovative project of their own, however, and faced a number of obstacles in previous attempts to work with a school. The second-year PBIS team learned from the first-year team that attempting to do their project in the school would likely prove challenging. Consequently, they chose to work in the community.

Providing Strategies for the Home

Adele and Shannon were members of the second-year PBIS team. This team had at least four opportunities to engage with the community. The first was as part of a

family fun day at Young Middle School in Zone 2. The school's Parent Teacher Association (PTA) president, Hannah, had graduated from PEP the previous year. Hannah invited the group to distribute information at the school's family fun day. In return, the group had to purchase a vendor table for $25. They displayed parenting books, distributed information about PBIS, and talked to any parent who stopped by their table. I asked Shannon how parents responded to this outreach. She recalled:

> There were probably about 15 parents that stopped by our table. And we were able to talk to them about behavior and school-wide discipline plans, and PBIS and how they had one at [Young] Middle School. But parents didn't seem to know and I think that's what we wanted to know. [We asked] "Do you know about PBIS?" "Do you know what PBIS is?" Then [after] we tell them what PBIS was, [we asked] did they know it was at their school. And most of the parents said they didn't even know.

At this event, the group also began advertising its next community outreach at Willow Grove Apartments, which was the group's "official" project. Their task was to take PBIS into the community and teach parents how to implement the strategies in the home. The group learned some strategies after attending a parenting workshop with Natalie, a parent coordinator at Young Middle School. Then the group took what they learned from Natalie's workshop along with Internet research to develop its own PowerPoint presentation for the project. The group chose to work with the Willow Grove Apartment Complex consisting primarily of Hispanic families. Natalie assisted the group with the PowerPoint and with making fliers.

Adele stated that the apartment complex management was "very supportive" of the project and allowed her group to give out fliers. The management also provided a room in the clubhouse for their workshop. During the actual workshop, the group guided parents and children in filling out a matrix (see Table 7) to identify ways that they could implement PBIS at home. Shannon recalled the parents and children discussing actions that children could take to be more responsible, such as ironing clothes the night before, or getting up without the parent having to wake the child up for school in the morning. Although only five or six parents attended, Natalie believed that the group did well. "I went the day that they had the workshop," Natalie recalled. "It was a Saturday, and they had a handful of parents show up, but they did a really good job of [setting] the foundation of PBIS."

In spite of the small showing at the apartment complex, Adele said that the parents were excited about the content of the presentation. When I asked her how she knew that they were excited, Adele responded:

> Because they were nodding, when we did the activity, we actually did the activity with the whole matrix—being responsible, being respectful, those things. And they actually were writing down things that their child could do in those areas. So

Table 7. *Sample PBIS Matrix to Use at Home*

	IN THE MORNING	MEALTIMES	AFTER SCHOOL ROUTINES/ CHORES	NIGHT TIME
Be Respectful				
Be Responsible				
Be Kind				

> to me I was like, "so you like the matrix?" [And the parents replied] "Oh yes, this is great." It was giving them a tool.

As an observer and supporter of the project, Natalie also noted that "they're giving them something; they're giving them strategies to use," and she thought that what they did was "excellent."

Shannon said that the majority of parents were aware of PBIS in the school, but they had not considered how to implement it at home. Adele believed that the parents were excited about learning this aspect of the PBIS program. She remarked,

> Now the parents that did show up were excited about the program. They were excited about us bringing to them what is used in the school, that matrix that PBIS programs create about being responsible, being respectful and they were able to [say] "yes! I can implement this at home; this is great." So when the child sees that matrix at school, they know they have a matrix at home. And therefore the behavior is being focused on at home, and now they're coming to school, there's no problem [with meeting the expectations].

Adele felt that it was important for PBIS to be implemented in the home as well as the school. She surmised,

> Because it's less confusing for the child and for the family to me. We want, you know, we can't expect the school to do those things that we truly are responsible for…So it's something that has to be a collaboration of both, everyone.

Shannon agreed that school and home should hold the same expectations of children:

> I think it would be great if schools worked harder to bridge discipline, the discipline plan, from the school to the home, in terms of not necessarily kids

> being in in-school suspension at home, but more so on teaching children…how to be respectful, how to be responsible. And talk to parents so that they'll be using the same words.

As a culturally affirming alternative to exclusionary discipline, PBIS resonated with the Hispanic community. Importantly, it also resonated with the PBIS team, who enthusiastically advocated for its use. By bridging the gap between the school and the home, the second-year PBIS team involved families in their children's education in a meaningful way that could yield outcomes in how their children experience school. The key idea here is teaching children how to behave. Hope believed that discipline too often focused on consequences and not enough on teaching, which is the true meaning of the word.[11] Adele and Shannon believed that the presentation at the Willow Grove Apartment Complex helped a small group of parents and students begin to think about how to teach behavioral expectations at home that were consistent with the expectations in the school.

Adele and Shannon's team had two additional community events. The third PBIS event focused on students instead of parents. Union Middle School's PTA invited the team to teach about PBIS in the home. Shannon estimated that they reached at least 50 students with that workshop. The PBIS team divided the students into groups of five and rotated the students through the sessions. They helped the students complete a PBIS matrix of what they could do at home with their families to be respectful, responsible, and kind. The fourth event was at Christ Church, one of the oldest African American churches in Dunham County. Shannon recalled that she suggested going to the church

[11] The Latin root for the word discipline is *disciplina* which means instruction or knowledge.

after their event at Willow Grove. She believed that going to a church would be a great idea because, unlike the residents in the Willow Grove Apartments, the church members were already in the habit of coming together as a community.

> If the people were already at church and at the time we started having people in the church advertising and saying "hey we're gonna get together for a parenting event and how you can best help your child in this school system," if you stay after, let them know that something was going to be happening after, immediately after church and food and childcare would be provided, that we were more likely to get participants. So we thought that would be a great idea and it actually was.

Shannon argued that Christ Church was ideal because it had a history of supporting education in the community. As one of the oldest cultural institutions in the African American community, the church also functioned as a site that was familiar to the church members. In contrast, as I will discuss in a later section, schools are not always welcoming. Presenting in the church gives parents a safe space to engage in conversations about school discipline.

Navigating the System and Removing Leeriness

To conduct their fourth community project, the second-year PBIS team reached out to Minister Anthony Corben, a descendant of the founders of Christ Church and coordinator of the church's social services. Many of these services were for the neighboring community, not just members of the congregation. In fact, Minister Corben estimated that only about 20% of the 3,000 members of the congregation actually lived near the church. Minister Corben was incredibly busy; he oversaw the day care center, a senior citizen center, an after school program, a summer camp, bereavement counseling,

and funeral consultation. The church also offered a General Educational Development (GED) program. Over 90% of the students in the GED program were Hispanic, further signaling that the church served the community and not just the overwhelmingly African American church population.

Christ Church welcomed the PEP participants' involvement and supported them by advertising the forthcoming PBIS presentation to the congregation. About 2-3 weeks in advance of the event, the church began inviting congregants through email blasts and "old fashioned" church announcements. Adele and Shannon's group created a brief video introduction, which the congregation viewed in advance. The group also provided a copy of their PowerPoint to Minister Corben in advance. In spite of the church's supportive advertising, those who were slated to attend the workshop that Saturday never made it. The death of a congregant led many to the sanctuary for a funeral. Adele recalled,

> So what ended up happening was that the majority of the people that were supposed to attend, well all of the people basically, were in the sanctuary attending the funeral. But what they were having that day was also called New Member's Orientation. And so with that, the coordinator of that event asked if we would come in and give our, not the full-blown presentation, but to modify it, and to present that to the new members. And so that's what we did. They gave us, they rearranged some things on their program and gave us some time to talk to the parents about a PBIS program.

Adele stated that the presentation at the church was "well received." Parents and students shared funny stories and were engaged in what Shannon described as "a back

and forth between the presenter and the parents," which is characteristic of the "call-and-response" in the African American oral tradition.[12] Parents also approached them after the session to request more information and to share stories about their children and some of the struggles and challenges that they had.

Minister Corben received feedback from those who attended the PBIS presentation. "It was all positive," he said. "People felt like they learned a lot." One of the things that parents learned was how to navigate the school system. Minister Corben said this was important to the congregants because even though many of them had children in Dunham County Schools, they were "very leery of the school system." Part of the reason for this leeriness was that the church saw the county fighting against one of the members over the creation of a charter school, leaving the school district with a stigma in the community. The PBIS group helped alleviate some of that leeriness for them. Minister Corben stated, "I think they felt more comfortable, the people who attended, more comfortable knowing where to take their concerns, and knowing that there was somebody else in the community with them."

Building Social & Political Capital (Power): Becoming Famous

Shannon mentioned that after their workshop at Union Middle School, they were invited back to Young Middle School to do a workshop there. I teased Shannon that her group was becoming famous. Laughing, she replied "it was free, and it was fun, and it was very professional so I can see why people wanted us to come." Initially the group was unsure if they could even do all of the workshops that they were invited to do

[12] Call-and-response is a part of the African American oral tradition. Listeners show their interest and engagement when they respond verbally to the speaker. See Townsend (2000).

because the project proposal had a budget attached. Ultimately, Adele and Shannon's group responded to every request from the community to share their knowledge about PBIS. Given all of the opportunities they had to connect with the community, and the fact that the community was requesting more presentations from them, Shannon felt like her group was very successful, describing the work as "absolutely fantastic" and "wonderful." She added, "as a parent I would have loved to have something like this at my children's school."

Shannon and Adele's group demonstrated the ability to build social capital in the community, which is the power or influence that results from relationships with others. Their presentations were making such an impact on the community that people were making requests. Young Middle School wanted them to return to their school to do a second presentation. The Willow Grove apartment community extended the opportunity for the group to return.

The group also began to build social capital through their connections at Christ Church. After their presentation, Minister Corben said that discussions around extending the PBIS group's work continued in the church, even though he had not yet shared the content of these conversations with the PBIS group. Minister Corben had a vision of having the group come to the church on a regular basis, possibly on one Saturday every three months. He wanted to see a parent's corner in the youth church and the children's church where parents could pick up information that targeted the needs of parents in the community. He also envisioned the group presenting to the mostly Hispanic students in the GED class along with their families and peers. Christ Church was even considering

putting a group of parents together to go through PEP and the church wanted the group to return and provide additional training.

A partnership with Christ Church could also yield political capital—power or influence in policy—for the organization. The church's pastor has served on the advisory board to the Dunham County school board and was instrumental in getting the first African American male principal hired in the district about five years ago. Not only would PEP be able to form relationships with members of the church, PEP could build relationships with the Hispanic community that the church serves. Further, the organization could leverage the church's influence in policy and draw on the economic and cultural strength of the church's institutional base to build political capital.

Developing Restorative Justice Programs

Like the PBIS teams, the restorative justice (RJ) teams developed their skills during the monthly trainings so that they could advocate in the community. Also like the PBIS teams, the second year of implementation was more successful than the first. During the first year of PEP, Melia and Shelby worked on the RJ team. They began by learning what disciplinary practices were in Dunham County and how these practices negatively affected students. Then they considered how culturally sensitive restorative practices, like restorative circles, could help school officials resolve conflict without resorting to suspensions. The group received training on restorative circles by someone who was certified in that practice. For their final project, they developed a guide for administrators to use with their staff. The guide was a report that discussed the history of restorative circles and their effectiveness, along with a systematic guide for how to conduct a restorative circle, including handouts and tips for how to handle student

questions and concerns. Because of time constraints, group dynamics, and resistance in the schools, the group never implemented a restorative circle. Shelby found circles interesting and learned a lot from her participation in PEP, and Melia later had an opportunity to facilitate a circle with Robin in the Kids Klub, but the project itself ended with only a written description of what they had hoped to do. When discussing the final project, Shelby admitted "our group never really got it totally off the ground." Still, even though the project itself ended with only a written description of what they had hoped to do, both Shelby and Melia remained enthusiastic about its potential.

Responding to Parents' Needs: Building a Support Group

During the second year of PBIS, Leslie and Melanie's group began with the intent to develop and implement an RJ project. They conducted a survey of parents whose children attended the Kids Klub to learn about their children's disciplinary history and other questions about their experiences in schools. The purpose of the survey was to generate feedback to guide the content of the parent workshops they were planning. The workshops took place once a week for six weeks, and each lasted about an hour. Each of the five group members took responsibility for one week's content. The survey results showed that the parents did not have a need for, and were not particularly interested in RJ. The group did move forward that first week with giving an overview of RJ but the conversations that evening reaffirmed that the project would not meet the needs of the parents. Leslie described the project as a progression over time, with each week's feedback fueling the design and content of the next week's workshop. The group placed the parents' needs at the center of their advocacy work. Their goal was to have ten parents participate in their program. They began with ten parents of elementary and

middle school children. Four had to drop out due to various personal reasons. In the end, the group conducted a program that taught parents on a number of topics, including peer support groups for children and encouraging the development of healthy relationships among children's peers. Leslie saw the benefit of the group transforming to a support network for the parents:

> But then being able to go through the workshop themselves, they saw that they weren't by themselves, 'cause oftentimes we service single parent mothers. So just to have that support of, okay somebody else is going through the same thing or [something] quite similar, or I have somebody else that I can talk to that has gone through it…So, just from parents having conversation with me afterwards showed that it was a good program.

Providing Tools

The RJ group gave parents tools for how to react when their children get in trouble in school and how to be proactive to keep them out of trouble. They discussed how to handle victim-offender issues (i.e., how to react if one's child is in the role of the victim in a conflict or if the child is the offender). They helped parents have a better understanding of their rights, such as the right to request a meeting with the principal or make an adjustment to an IEP. These parents gained the resources to support their children in the home and to navigate disciplinary challenges in the school system.

Sharing Experiences, Learning New Approaches, Gaining Confidence

Melanie noticed that the parents appreciated being able to share stories with one another and learning about the various approaches that others were taking with raising their children. The support group came to realize that even a child with a similar

situation might need a different approach in order to be successful in school. The group had some difficult conversations with the parents about the role that they were playing in their children's academic or behavioral challenges. Parents were encouraged to be an advocate for their children and not necessarily accept a school's decision about their children, whether that decision relate to an academic or behavioral challenge. They also learned about the policies that were affecting their children and strategies that they could take to address them. Melanie recalled vividly the kinds of conversations that they had with parents when discussing the *No Child Left Behind* policies:

> Half the parents were like "What? Is that why my kid got 45 kids in the classroom?" You're like "mm-hm." They're like, "What?" Just little things. They're like, "I didn't realize that." And we're like, "Did you read that handbook?" And we went to a specific page and they [were] like, "Are you kidding me?"

Melanie said that they helped raise parents' awareness about how to change policies. She shared,

> They didn't know they could push and possibly change some laws. I mean they knew, but they didn't how easy it was. How [much] easier it is nowadays than when we were in the 1950s and 60s and we pushed more harder back in those days and now we don't even want to move. So we're just giving them information that they didn't know.

The second-year RJ group succeeded in forming a network of support for parents. They also helped them to understand school policies impacting their children and gave them tools to advocate for and support their children.

The members of PEP engaged in advocacy to raise parents' awareness about school discipline reform and parents' involvement in culturally sensitive approaches to reducing disparities. The PBIS groups engaged in advocacy by teaching parents at community events about school discipline and by providing strategies, like the PBIS matrix, for parents and students to use at home. The PEP members identified with PBIS as a culturally affirming method of addressing disciplinary challenges, particularly because of its emphasis on involving families in setting the same expectations in the home as in the school. By engaging with parents in conversations about the school system, PEP became an extension of the schools, thereby removing the leeriness that many parents in the community had about Dunham County. The second-year PBIS team's skillfulness at providing this training led to multiple requests for their presentation at community events and led to the development of social capital and the potential for political capital.

Although the first-year RJ team never had an opportunity to advocate in the community, Melia took what she learned to conduct a circle with a group of students at another organization. The second-year RJ team engaged in advocacy with parents through inquiry-based learning. The RJ team presented information and parents shared stories, asked questions, and exchanged ideas. Instead of adhering to their initial plans, the team operated in the tradition of Black women in the civil rights era who placed the needs of the community at the center of the learning experience. The RJ team responded to the needs of the parents and developed a six-week program that provided tools and strategies to support parents with their children. The team helped parents to understand policies that were negatively impacting their children, but they also helped parents

examine the obstacles that they were creating for their children. Armed with knowledge of their rights and information about educational policies, parents likely completed the program with the confidence to advocate for their children more effectively.

The impact of PEP's work in the community is promising, and the change in the number of people that the projects have reached from year one to year two is noteworthy. In the first year, the projects only reached about ten parents and children in the community. By the end of the second year, the projects reached over 100 parents and children in the community (see Table 8).

What Factors Supported or Hindered the Organization's Ability to Raise Parents' Awareness and Build Social Capital for Advocacy and Activism?

Learning how to work within PEP's project groups was one thing; learning how to interact with people outside of the group was quite another, particularly with people in the school system. The participants, mainly during the first year, wanted to collaborate with schools to implement their projects, but they met considerable resistance. During the second year, the groups analyzed the reasons for the challenges that the first year groups experienced and pursued other methods for connecting with the community.

Table 8. *Approximate Attendance at Each Community Project*

PBIS Cohort 1	RJ Cohort 1	PBIS Cohort 2				RJ Cohort 2
Union High School	No community outreach	Young Middle School	Willow Grove Apartments	Union Middle School	Christ Church	Kids Klub Parent Support Group
10 adults and children	0	15 adults	6 adults	50 students	30 adults	8 adults

Natalie's insights as a parent coordinator offer a critical analysis of PEP's work and how they could overcome some of their challenges. In this section I discuss not just the challenges with implementing the projects, but also the challenges that parents have had with being involved in their local schools for purposes unrelated to the PEP projects to show the amount of resistance the organization experienced in school spaces. This resistance illustrates a constraint to building social and political capital among educational stakeholders. Then I discuss the opportunities PEP participants had to build social and political capital in the community outside of the schools.

Constraints in School Spaces

The parental involvement that I describe in this section falls under two broad categories: general involvement to offer support, and child advocacy to question and challenge a school's practices. Shannon, Robin, and Adele each made attempts to get involved to offer their general support. Shannon and Robin had interactions with teachers that communicated a lack of desire for the parents' presence. Shannon explained that by having two children, each year she experienced the personalities of two different teachers. She found that the amount of involvement that teachers desired "depended on the individual teacher." Shannon did not always feel welcomed in her children's classrooms. She remarked,

> Sometimes I found that the teacher didn't want me there and then there were other times I felt that I was somewhat in the way, that she already had what she needed and that she didn't really need my help.

Shannon noticed a marked difference between her attempts to get involved in the middle school versus the elementary school:

> When you go in the middle school it's a lot different because they are truly looking to see if you have some type of agenda or why are you actually here, what do you actually want. They're looking at the motivation behind why you're actually trying to interact with middle school children at that point.

Robin also recalled that when she went to the school to volunteer, she encountered resistance. She believed that teachers were afraid to open up because of her history of keeping records of actions that affected her son. One teacher in particular was hostile toward Robin but one day Robin simply told him, "I'm not your enemy. I understand; I'm here to help." Teachers thought that Robin would expose them for not doing something correctly, but she was only there to offer her support.

In contrast, Adele said that she never had any problems collaborating with anyone in the school. Nevertheless, despite the perception that schools desire an increased parental presence in schools, Shannon and Robin felt unwelcomed.

The participants offered several more examples of how schools showed resistance, especially if outsiders were attempting to obtain information, question a policy, or advocate for a child. Elena, a community member that supported DCP3 and PEP's initiatives, worked for a statewide organization that assisted parents of children with special needs. At times she needed to collaborate with education professionals in the school. Elena's knowledge of how school districts operated in multiple counties in the state helped her to determine which schools were most open to outside organizations. As for Dunham County, the elementary schools tended to be more cooperative than the secondary schools. Elena explained,

> [Dunham] as I was telling you, my impression is that we are working very, very good with elementary schools. But then we lose track when their children go to middle or to high school. I don't know if it is because there's so much population in one school that the principal really needs to show tougher or whatever. The collaboration is very difficult, very difficult.

Curious to know what made the collaboration difficult, I pressed the point further. Elena continued to describe the resistance in the schools. She said that the schools did not want the parents to be too informed and they did not like it when outside organizations started raising concerns and asking questions. She also noted that people often did not return her phone calls when she sought information for a case. "You have to be very, very persistent," Elena explained. "You leave the messages I need to speak with this [person], and they take all the time in the world to answer you."

Comments from the PEP participants aligned with Elena's perception that the schools did not want parents to know "too much." For instance, when I shared with Melanie my challenges finding information on the state's alternative school laws, she agreed and told me, "Right, it's not gonna be clear at all." Before her involvement in PEP, Shelby never knew anything about manifestation determination, a process that protects children from suspension when their behavior is the result of their disability. She did not believe that the school was purposely hiding this information, but she did recognize that "they don't try to give you other options that maybe are available." The school district offered parenting classes and hosted workshops to keep parents informed of some of their rights, but this information was very limited. Shelby used to participate as a facilitator in these workshops. She described the content as "school-approved" and

"very clean." Shelby explained that the facilitators "won't give any kind of, how to get around it tips or anything like that because they are paid by the county." So in spite of Shelby being a leader for other parents, she herself had limited knowledge of how to advocate for her own child.

A Culture of Bullying and Fear

Hope had more intimate knowledge of the ways in which the district has excluded certain people and actions from taking place in school spaces. Hope described Dunham County Schools as having a culture of bullying. She shared stories of the district bullying parents, students, and school employees. Local news outlets have reported on the district charging parents with crimes for advocating for their children (Local news reports documents). A number of school district employees worked with DCP3, but they all worked "underground." Hope explained:

> The staff who work with us are very underground. So they will not publicly say they know us, speak with us, or any of that. But they will give us that information and they let it be known that they're ruled pretty much with an iron fist.

In describing how the district imparted the fear to speak publicly into its employees, Hope remarked,

> With staff, it's demotion. Shipping you off to the school you don't wanna be at or the school on the other side of town, or put you in a devalued community, things like that. Out and out firing. There were several stories that have made the news with staff advocating in [Dunham] County who were then gone after by the district and held up to be the menaces of the community when in fact they were

> just doing things that opened up policy and they questioned it. And that's all that you need to do is question it.

Another way that the district bullied parents was through their children. Hope insisted "the fastest way to really throw a parent into a panic is to have [her child] constantly in trouble." Hope cited a specific example of the parent of a child in special education. After the parent questioned the methods that the teacher was using to help her child, the child started receiving disciplinary referrals at the same time everyday (which the Dunham County Parents against Push-out Program tracked for the parent). These referrals ultimately turned into suspensions. The parents and the child both wanted to reach a compromise with how to address the child's needs, but the school refused.

The lack of cooperation between parents and schools pushed some parents to seek outside counsel. Shelby's son had disciplinary struggles as a result of his autism, but the school made it difficult for her to get his needs met. She described the process of getting services for her son as "dragging on and dragging on." She finally decided to hire an advocate. At that point, Shelby noted that suddenly everyone was involved in meeting Dylan's needs:

> We had a meeting for [Dylan]'s eligibility and it was me, the advocate, and they brought everybody in the school practically. They had the principal. They had people from the county, just because I had hired an advocate. 'Cause once you hire an advocate then that's like "oh no"—all-out war. 'Cause they don't want anybody in there who knows what's going on.

Shelby's son ultimately got the services that he needed, but she had to pay with her time and money because the advocate, Shelby said, was "not cheap."

The culture of bullying and fear in Dunham County Schools made it difficult for the PEP participants to implement their projects in the schools. Melia witnessed the fear to speak publicly among the teachers that she knew. She shared that although many teachers thought that her group's RJ project would be beneficial, none of them were willing to let her implement it in their classrooms. The teachers begged her not to report anything that they shared with her about their interactions with parents or classroom challenges. Melia described the reaction that she got from the teachers:

> I would equate it to a terror…that I would promise them, never [to] repeat [what we talked about]. And so that was like [sighs], it was so disheartening. So therefore they couldn't even help me introduce [restorative circles] into their school or their classroom because of that fear.

Robin also identified fear among teachers. She asked teachers why they were willing to pass children who had not mastered the content:

> I began asking the teachers why, how, why don't you guys come together and speak up? And every teacher, I mean, *every* teacher said "well, we're told by the superintendent we can't fail the kids…and if we do speak up we'll lose our jobs." And so my thing was, so you feel comfortable passing these kids knowing they're not, I mean, passing them forward knowing they're failing? And it was all about their jobs. And I can understand that to a certain degree, but at the same time I'm like, I'mma just have to lose my job. There's no way I feel comfortable knowing I'm not teaching these kids.

Shelby noted that school administrators were hesitant to let them in the schools. She believed that administrators were mostly concerned about rules and regulations about

the parents being in the school in a teaching capacity without any training. Although the group was optimistic, Shelby was not surprised by the lack of enthusiasm from administrators because she was aware of the "red tape" in schools and the fear that administrators had of liability issues. As a school parent coordinator, Natalie also noted the potential for problems. She explained:

> Schools are a tough place. First of all we're very territorial, us educators. That's our territory. And so to open our doors and let parents come in, and do trainings and stuff like that, we're very, very cautious about that. If a parent comes in to do some kind of training with a student and slips up and says something that, off the wall or just whatever, and that child goes home and tells their parent, it can be devastating.

Although schools generally claim to want parents to be more involved, the participants noticed that not all involvement was welcomed.

Building Trust

One factor that supported the organization's ability to raise parents' awareness and build social capital was trust. Whereas resistance in schools was a constraint to the PEP's work, the organization had a number of opportunities to build social capital in the community by building trust with parents. Natalie argued that if parents and schools spoke the same language, they could learn to trust one another. She explained,

> The other thing that a parent…if a parent understands the vocabulary in education, then when they come in and they speak my language, the language of educators, then we're better able to trust them, because they understand…what's going on. It's a totally different vocabulary and until they understand how the

> system works, why it's the way it is, and the vocabulary of the system, then they really don't understand the world of education.

Natalie said that she teaches education vocabulary to the parents that she works with so that they know how to advocate for their children. She also mentioned the importance of speaking the same language so that they could build trust. From Natalie's perspective, building trust could help the PEP members overcome challenges to implementing their projects in the schools.

Although PEP faced a number of constraints in schools, opportunities to build social capital with parents existed in the community. The second-year PBIS group conducted a workshop in the Willow Grove Apartment Complex, a predominantly Hispanic community. According to Natalie, one of the strengths of the workshop was that the PEP participants and the residents in the community spoke the same language, as one parent to another. She recalled:

> And it was parent to parent. It wasn't educator to parent or doctor to parent or teacher to parent. It was parent [*claps hands for emphasis*] to parent [*claps*]. And usually when you're parent to parent, you're gonna get a lot better response. That's why I tend to be able to gain the trust of parents because when I relate to them, half of them don't even know I'm a teacher; they don't know I'm certified. They think I'm a parent. They think I'm just a parent volunteering in the center. So when I talk to them parent to parent, they understand it better.

In order for the PEP participants to build trust with the parents in the community, they had to speak the parents' language, and not the language of the school. "School's a threatening place," Natalie explained, "especially if you had a bad experience in school

as a child." Coming from the perspective of a parent and not a teacher or administrator was one way to help parents let down their guard and begin to trust the PEP members. By this logic, the work that the group did in Christ Church built trust as well, because the group did not present in the school, which can feel threatening to some parents.

Natalie also stated that in order to build trust, parents needed to receive factual information. She explained,

> Whatever you're telling [parents] has to be the facts. You have to do whatever you're doing with integrity. And when they see that you're not going to sacrifice that integrity and you're telling them what's real, whether they wanna hear it or not, then they'll again continue to gain that trust.

All of the groups believed that they were able to research and present good (real, factual) information on their topics, particularly during the second year of PEP. For instance, Melanie's group was not afraid to tell the parents information that was "real." While discussing the impact of her team's work with the parent support groups, she said:

> A lot of them, they were more thankful and grateful to where, I think we opened up a can of worms to help them realize that although you are a parent, you gotta figure out, if a kid is having issues most of the time it might be because of you. Let's just be real with this. So it was eye opening for them to realize that they had to make some changes. A lot of, that's what mostly all of [the parents were] saying it was just like, it was interesting to see and it was hard to see at the same time 'cause [they saw that they] had to make some changes in [their] household.

Reaching out and sharing information from a parent's perspective, and being sometimes painfully honest with parents were two ways that the PEP members built trust.

A third way to build trust was by being committed to that community of parents. Natalie insisted:

> First of all it takes being committed. Parents will know if you're truly committed or not. If you say you're gonna do something, you better do it. That's one way to show that you truly mean what you're saying. And parents are a lot like kids; they'll test you to see if you're really serious, are you really serious about doing this. And if you show them that you're serious and you're committed, then they'll start to trust you.

From Natalie's perspective, building trust was essential to PEP's organizing work and could open the door for additional opportunities in the community.

The school system was the greatest factor that hindered the organization's ability to raise parents' awareness and build social capital. The parents learned how territorial schools can be, even when they are trying to be supportive. A careful analysis of the factors that hindered or supported the organization's work reveals that building trust in the community is likely the best way for PEP to continue to raise awareness about school discipline reform and build social capital to increase its influence and ability to advocate.

What Can the Parent Empowerment Program Do to Improve its Efforts in the Future and Reach a Level of Sustained Activism?

In this final section I discuss two factors that will contribute to PEP's ability to improve its efforts in the future and reach a level of sustained activism. The first factor is to engage the graduates of the program and create a space for them to continue to meet on a regular basis. The second related factor is for the graduates to maintain a consistent presence in the communities where they have begun to develop relationships.

Engaging the Graduates

PEP concludes with a graduation ceremony in the spring. Hope continued to invite graduates to participate in the program by serving as mentors to the new cohort and attending community events, but there are no other requirements or regularly scheduled activities beyond that. The program's intensive commitment likely made it challenging to keep the momentum going for some, but most of the parents expressed a desire to keep supporting the work of DCP3 and PEP. Shelby was especially interested in continuing her involvement.

> I'm gonna say when it ended I was a little bit disappointed that there weren't action steps or things that we were going to be taking after we left. And I know [Hope] invited us to come to the second [PEP cohort], but I think maybe if there were a few meetings, like maybe once a quarter and we brought the people from the first [cohort] with the second one, or the people who took over our project, would love to meet them, just hear more from [DCP3] or [PEP] about what is going on, where we need to be looking and what kinds of things we could do.

Sabrina also offered a vision for how to keep the momentum going after the projects end, recognizing the challenges of parents to remain committed:

> I think that there's a lot invested in these parents over nine months and like I said, I don't think that the real work starts in that period necessarily. So I think I'd like to see, you can't ask them to commit longer than nine months. You don't own them; they can ignore all of your emails after you leave or whatever. But I think that some sort of way, so maybe you graduate and you become part of this organization that meets once a month and talks about what's going on in their

> school and mobilizing parents in addition to the alum of PEP…sort of this community organization of parents who are concerned about this issue, who learned from the PEP alum, and really leverage the training over the nine months.

Sabrina continued to describe how this group could use their training to augment their involvement in the community as a collective force. Even if all of the graduates could not attend a school board meeting, for instance, maybe two of them could. Then once a month they could come together to discuss what sorts of issues were in the school district, what elections were taking place, and possibly even campaign for a school board member. Sabrina thought that the group could expand to consider other issues in addition to school discipline that could help improve education in the district. Such actions, particularly if done in conjunction with an institution with cultural and economic resources like a church, could help the organization increase its political capital in the community. They also take the participants beyond advocacy and lead them to activism, whereby they engage in sustained, intentional activities to promote change in the community.

Foundation for Future Work: A Consistent Presence

In addition to the graduates meeting to convene around an issue or get involved politically, the participants can move toward activism by remaining committed to the communities where they began their projects. Shannon recognized that the foundation was laid for a strong community partnership with the Willow Grove Apartment Complex and Christ Church, although collaborating with the apartment complex would take a bit more work. Adele believed that they needed to saturate the Willow Grove community with information and build a reputation among the residents to get them to feel

comfortable coming to the sessions. Shannon thought that the solution to the low attendance was a bit more complex than just a need to increase advertising. She stated,

> When we went to the apartment complex, it wasn't already an active community in terms of the residents were not coming together and utilizing the clubhouse. I mean they were utilizing it for birthday parties. But in terms of them coming together for any type of community event, everyone in the apartment coming together to do stuff, they were not doing that. And so when we actually put up fliers on the door and invited the community into the clubhouse, I felt, and some of the other group members felt, because the attendance was so low, they were not used to coming together for things like that.

Because they did not already come together for community events, Shannon believed that PEP would have to support regular events in that community to build a habit of the parents coming together. These events could start with things that were more immediately beneficial, such as health screenings or vision screenings for children, or a movie night.

Natalie concurred that in order to make a huge transformation on the community, there needed to be a stronger commitment. Natalie, who helped the group prepare for their presentation in the Willow Grove apartment complex, believed that the PBIS group would only see large numbers if they had a regular presence in the community. She stated that getting a large number of parents to show up for events like that was challenging:

> I always tell, when people are trying to develop and implement a program, they want huge amounts, huge numbers of people. And that's really, that's almost impossible unless you're very famous.

Consistency and a willingness to take "baby steps" are required to make that larger impact. Natalie continued,

> If you have one parent show up, that's one parent that you're going to share your philosophy with, what it is you're trying to do, teach, model. And that one parent will go out and bring another parent. And then those two will bring two more, and it will grow. But you just gotta stay with it and keep working on it.

In order to make the kind of impact that they wanted in the apartment complex community, the group would have had to be committed to going into that community on a regular basis. Natalie did not believe that the group was prepared to do that, and the PEP design did not allow for that level of involvement. Similarly, the PEP design did not allow for an ongoing relationship with Christ Church. The church took an interest in the organization and wanted them to return on a regular basis, but neither PEP nor the church had taken the next step.

Summary

The cultural heritage of the members of the Parent Empowerment Program was vital to their work in the community, setting the foundation for the organization and permeating the organization's core processes of building awareness, preparation for advocacy, analysis of constraints and opportunities to build power, and moving toward activism. The co-founders shared in the organizing tradition of Black women during the civil rights era in forming the organization, providing a model for the participants to

emulate in their own work. The participants shared a history and identity that set the purpose for their advocacy. With this foundation in place, participants engaged in training to build their own awareness of educational policies, including an understanding of how the school-to-prison pipeline functions as a systemic problem. Equipped with the support of their teams and members of the community, the participants built social capital—which translates into power for organizing groups—by advocating for culturally sensitive alternatives to reduce disciplinary disparities in the school district. They found resistance in the schools, but successfully analyzed ways to increase their influence with others in the Dunham County community by building trust in an apartment complex, a Kid Klub, and a church. The potential for even greater impacts exists among the graduates of the program, particularly if they are willing to become an active, consistent presence in the community and partner with strong institutions like churches that can help the organization build another vital source of power—political capital.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION & IMPLICATIONS

In this final chapter, I return to my original five research questions:

1. What role does the cultural heritage of the participants play in the organization's work?
2. What impacts has the organization had on the participants, community, and on reducing discipline disparities in the school system to date?
3. How did members of the organization work to raise parents' awareness about school discipline reform, and facilitate parents' involvement in culturally sensitive approaches to reducing disparities in school discipline?
4. What factors supported or hindered the organization's work?
5. What can the organization do to improve its efforts in the future?

Because this research study was complex and involved multiple layers, I will focus this chapter on those areas that are most salient for further discussion in conjunction with the literature: the African American cultural heritage as the foundation for the organization's work; developing awareness by increasing knowledge through training and working together; engaging in advocacy to build social and political capital; analyzing opportunities and constraints to building power; and moving toward activism. I then move to a discussion of how this research study compares to existing organizing frameworks, I identify resources necessary for the organization to make a sustained community impact, and then I conclude with policy implications.

The Foundation: The African American Cultural Heritage

Founders Organizing in the Spirit of the African American Civil Rights Movement

The co-founders of the Parent Empowerment Program (PEP) began their organizing work through meetings with community stakeholders about their experiences with disparate disciplinary practices. Hope and the other co-founders took their time—about a year—to develop the structure for their organization, which subsequently led them to form PEP. By reflecting a belief in "inquiry and engagement, rather than indoctrination" (Oakes & Rogers, 2006, p. 104), their approach emulated Black women's organizing experiences in the civil rights tradition. In other words, the co-founders engaged in dialogue with the Dunham community for a year to determine the vision for the organization instead of imposing their own agenda. Whereas organizing in the Alinsky tradition was motivated by self-interest and a desire to improve life for members of one's social class, women in the civil rights tradition drew their motivation from a desire to bring about change in society as a whole (Oakes & Rogers, 2006). Men are often portrayed as the leaders of the civil rights era but women led the way with the difficult, "day-to-day" local organizing work (Warren & Mapp, 2011, p. 17). Women as organizers brought to the fore the importance of relationship building and an ethic of caring (Oakes & Rogers, 2006; Warren & Mapp, 2011). African American women like Ella Jo Baker, Septima Clark, and Bernice Johnson, among countless others, appealed to people's sense of human dignity and incited them to become outraged enough by injustice to take action (Oakes & Rogers, 2006).

Baker is primarily responsible for changing the male-dominated approach to community organizing leadership and activism (Ransby, 2003). Her organizing work

was mostly "behind-the-scenes" because she believed that with the right tools, people could lead themselves (Oakes & Rogers, 2006; Ransby, 2003). While this perspective does overlap with Alinsky's belief in developing community leaders, she departed from his position in other matters. Alinsky believed that organizations should "have no permanent friends and no permanent enemies, just permanent issues" (Oakes & Rogers, 2006, p. 103). In contrast, Baker viewed relationships as foundational to any long-term campaign and she invested considerable time in local communities to develop them. Alinsky's position also contrasts with African-centered organizers Sandra O'Donnell and Sokoni Karanja (2000) who began their work in the Alinsky tradition. After watching their work "implode," O'Donnell and Karanja determined that "a focus on collaborative community development and consensus organizing" was more in line with the African cultural heritage than treating others like enemies (p. 81). O'Donnell and Karanja believe that sustained community organizing work cannot happen without attention to the indigenous culture. The PEP founders' willingness to take a year to form their umbrella organization, the Dunham County Parents against Push-out Program, gives credence to their belief in the importance of building relationships.

Similarly, Septima Clark and Bernice Robinson found relationship building critical to their work. They collaborated with other activists to develop the Citizenship Education Program, which they used to teach people to read and to understand how the government worked in order to vote (Clark, 1986; Horton & Freire, 1990; Lazar, 2005; Oakes & Rogers, 2011; Warren & Mapp, 2011). Because knowledge "can contribute to the exercise of power through informed and activated participants" (Oakes & Rogers, 2006, p. 96), Clark and Robinson sought to provide people with a political education.

Political education "helps people situate their personal and contemporary situation in a larger historical and collective narrative while developing the tools to critique structures of inequality" (Warren & Mapp, 2011, p. 17). Before expecting people to commit to organizing around an issue, the women knew that they had to educate people about its significance in a way that placed their needs and interests at the center of the learning experience (Clark, 1986; Horton & Freire, 1990). According to Myles Horton, with whom Clark and Robinson worked to form the Citizenship Education Program, "education makes possible organization" (Horton & Freire, 1990, p. 115).

PEP's training series is akin to political education. Beginning with the two-day retreat in August and continuing each Saturday for an additional five to six months, the PEP participants were inundated with information about national, state, and local school policies and practices. They gained awareness of education policies through this training. Hope also incorporated training on group dynamics and communication to foster relationship building. Just as Baker, Clark, and Robinson worked to develop informed, indigenous leadership that leveraged the power of their relationships and political knowledge, Hope worked to develop informed, indigenous leadership in Dunham County that could leverage the power of their relationships—with each other and within the community—and their new political knowledge to effect change. PEP's work shared in the organizing tradition that Baker, Clark, and Robinson established.

Shared History of Educational Injustice Informing Cultural Perspectives and Critiques

The participants shared a history of witnessing their own children or children in their communities experience inequities and injustices in school. Robin argued that if

African American children were able to experience a meaningful curriculum that connected with them and reflected their greatness as a people, schools would have fewer discipline problems. Robin insisted, "when we're taught according to our culture, we can excel just like…anybody else."

One area of injustice in schools is in how educators criminalize children of color. Hope and Shannon's sons were targeted with disciplinary consequences because of their appearance. The school targeted Hope's son repeatedly for dress code violations, falsely accusing him of wearing gang-related apparel. The charges against him were simply unfounded, but the practice of treating children in this way has a long history in this country. Research indicates that African American children do not misbehave more than students of other racial/ethnic backgrounds (CDF, 1975; Sheldon & Epstein, 2002) and one study found that "White and Hispanic students were *more likely* than African-American students to commit offenses that trigger mandatory expulsion" (Fabelo et al., 2011, p. 46). African American students are simply punished more for committing the same types of offenses as other students. In some cases, like Hope's son, children do not have to commit an offense to receive a consequence. Victor Rios (2011) noted that the young men in his study did not engage in criminal activity until after repeated targeting by teachers and police. Further, this repeated attack on children leads many to "internalize a foreign concept, that criminality was part of their persona" (Rios, 2011, p. 52).

A culturally centered education can begin to alleviate (though not completely erase) some of these inequities. For one, it will promote higher levels of engagement in the curriculum and address the purposes of schooling for African American children.

Second, teaching children to identify positively with their racial/ethnic identity actually protects African American children from some of the damage of discrimination. Studies indicate that in African American communities, a positive identification with one's racial/ethnic identity has benefits of compensating for discrimination in schools (Chavous, Rivas-Drake, Smalls, Griffin, & Cogburn, 2008; Wong, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2003). Third, when children (and teachers) of other racial/ethnic groups engage in African-centered curriculum, it can help them to respect the cultural heritage of African American students (Nobles, 2008). These are only beginning steps, however, that are more likely to support the African American child's response to racist disciplinary practices than to stop them altogether.

Critique of Testing Practices

Currently, much of the rhetoric surrounding education suggests that the purpose of schooling is to prepare students as individuals for their future adult lives in college and/or careers. Connecting education to the well being of their group, which is consistent with African and African American values, is not promoted in schools. This perspective leads to educational policy that focuses primarily on academics and the acquisition of factual knowledge. Far too often, this "factual" knowledge paints a distorted picture of African American history and culture. Further, current policy shifts have led to an overreliance on standardized tests to measure educational progress.

Both Robin and Shelby were highly critical of the testing regime, noting the increased fear and pressure that teachers and students felt as a result. Robin stated that students' "learning is fear-based; their teaching is fear-based," and insisted "that's not

what school should ever have been about." Shelby noted, "When those teachers start ramping up for the tests," her son "practically can't go to school 'cause he's so nervous."

As the mother of two sons in special education, Shelby was also critical of the way in which the district set testing goals. She learned that the goals for Black and Hispanic children were lower than those for White and Asian students, and there were no goals at all for special education students. DCP3 has determined that the district's practice is in violation of several laws, including the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), No Child Left Behind, and the Americans with Disabilities Act. DCP3 wants the district to have high academic standards for all children, and the literature supports maintaining high standards even for students in special education. The majority (80-85%) of students in special education "can meet the same achievement standards as other students if they are given access to the same content as their typical peers are provided specially designed instruction, supports, and accommodations when needed" in accordance with IDEA (Thurlow, Quenmoen, & Lazarus, n.d., p. 2).

Participants Sharing in the African American Cultural Heritage and Identity

The PEP participants shared a cultural identity. One outcome of this shared identity was a village consciousness, which was a requirement for participation in PEP. Each project that the participants developed was for community engagement, not individual advocacy. Adele, Leslie, Robin, Shelby, Tina, Melia, and Melanie each demonstrated their commitment to being part of a village in raising children in their communities. Adele, who intentionally sought out a village for her own children, shared that she wanted to be a part of the village for others in her church. When she noticed

challenges with her nephew and a lack of support in the family for him, she determined that she needed to, "step in and really be a part of that village." Leslie, who had no children of her own, wanted to support the development of other people's children. She viewed her work as "an opportunity to impact somebody for the rest of their life." Robin felt that she had every right to approach a school principal about the way a child was being graded. Even though this was not her child, for Robin, this was a child in her village. Melia and Melanie showed their commitment to the village by starting nonprofit mentoring organizations for youth in their communities.

Shelby and Tina, both non-African American, shared concerns about the apathy in their communities regarding children with disciplinary challenges. Tina noted that others were not only unaware, they were "not concerned" and "not doing anything about it." Tina stated, "as long as it's not their child it doesn't affect them." Shelby also noted how in discussions about disciplinary issues, people in the community "check out" mentally. She shared that their responses were typically "that don't affect me" or "I'm outta here." Importantly, Shelby recognized that "whatever happens to any group in the school is gonna affect the total. And everybody needs to get involved. If your child is not in special ed, special ed policies still affect what's going on."

This village consciousness is an example of the collectivist worldview (Swartz, 2009) informed by the African cultural heritage and was part of the participants' shared identity. Shelby and Tina shared this aspect of the African worldview in spite of not being African American. Laing's (2009) study found that African American culture-based community organizations held a broad definition of community, which encompassed Africans throughout the Diaspora in addition to African Americans within

their local communities. For PEP, sharing a village consciousness was important for at least two reasons: (a) "strong forms of community organizing engage people through their shared connections"; and (b) strong community organizing efforts focus on communities, not "isolated individuals" (Warren & Mapp, 2011, p. 19). The strength of PEP's foundation likely came from the requirement that members share this village consciousness. Further, PEP's work likely drew its strength from privileging the community over individual advocacy efforts. On the other hand, this does raise a question: Should parents lacking a village consciousness be denied an opportunity to develop that collective consciousness? Perhaps PEP can tap into the passion that a parent has for her child and broaden her scope during the yearlong training. Regardless, at some point each parent needs this collective mindset that is germane to African American culture. Importantly, O'Donnell and Karanja (2000) found with their community organizing work in Chicago, a failure to draw on the strengths of the indigenous culture makes it difficult to sustain resident participation.

Developing Awareness: Increasing Knowledge through Training and Working Together

Increase in Knowledge

Nearly every PEP participant indicated that their knowledge increased as a result of their participation. Specifically, the participants indicated new knowledge of educational policies in general, and special education policies in particular; how to interpret the student handbook; how to find information, particularly when they wanted to speak with educational leaders; and the systemic nature of the school-to-prison pipeline.

Participants also learned more about themselves and how to work with others in their project groups.

These findings are commensurate with the outcomes of organizing in other groups throughout the country. In Mediratta, Shah, and McAlister's (2009) longitudinal, mixed-methods study of eight community organizations, they found that more than 40% of participants know more about school policies and how to advocate for changes in their children's schools. About 50% of respondents to their survey indicated increased knowledge of who makes decisions in schools. Nearly 80% stated that they were more likely to look at data from their children's school and raise questions with school and district administrators.

Increased knowledge about school policies precedes parents' ability to advocate for change, but once they were knowledgeable, many increased their level of involvement. As a result of their experiences in PEP, Robin, Adele, and Shannon each felt more equipped to speak out publicly on the issues that they observed in the school district. In Mediratta, Shah, and McAlister's (2009) study, they found that about half of participants felt more confident about speaking in public as well. Additional research on community organizing supports these findings (Oakes & Rogers, 2006; Warren & Mapp, 2011). Developing public speaking and negotiating skills helps participants to articulate the demands of an organization. Speaking publicly (especially through media outlets) not only amplifies the voice of the organization, it pressures decision makers to respond to the organization's demands (Mediratta, Shah, & McAlister, 2009).

For Tina, an advocate for children in special education, learning more about special education policies was especially helpful and in spite of previous training, she did

not feel equipped to begin working as an advocate until after completing PEP. Tina was especially shocked by the lack of protections that students in special education had from harsh disciplinary consequences. The 1997 reauthorization of IDEA was supposed to resolve the problem of students with disabilities being punished excessively when acting out of their disability (Dwyer, n.d.). Students with disabilities often cannot learn behavioral expectations intuitively like other students. Students with disabilities "by definition" have difficulty with learning, and this includes learning behavioral norms and skills for interacting in social settings (Dwyer, n.d.). Still, research shows that students in special education continue to receive exclusionary disciplinary consequences at higher rates than their non-disabled peers (Fabelo et al., 2011; Losen & Martinez, 2013).

Shelby found it ironic that she still had so much to learn after working for the district as a parent advocate. Special education policies are barriers to parents for a number of reasons. In some instances, schools do not have the funding to provide adequate special education services (Phillips, 2007/2008). Although under IDEA, the federal government can provide grants reflecting the number of children receiving services times 40% of the national average per pupil expenditure, the average amount of funding has been only 15% of the per pupil expenditure. Because evaluations of students and implementation of services can be costly, many school districts will not comply with requests for evaluations or subsequent reviews of services unless they face pressure from parents and an external advocate. Another source of resistance is the highly individualized nature of IDEA. Because each student has different needs, schools sometimes cannot accurately predict the amount of funding that they need in order to provide services for students. Finally, special education requires extensive paperwork

requirements. Compared to general education teachers who spend about 1.6 hours on paperwork each week, special education teachers spend 4.7 hours per week (Phillips, 2007/2008).

Other barriers to parental advocacy in special education result from IDEA's "unstated presumption" that parents know how to effectively advocate for their children (Phillips, 2007/2008, p. 1828). In short, the barriers exist because parents are unlikely to accurately diagnose a disability, they lack knowledge about the options and services available to disabled children, and if parents hope to challenge a school's decision, they must be able to communicate effectively with school leaders and have knowledge of IDEA's procedural requirements. Further, there is the problem of "educator resentment," which refers to the perception that parents are too emotionally attached to their children to speak intelligibly or objectively about their children's academic needs. Consequently, educators will hold "highly formal, noninteractive" IEP meetings filled with "education jargon" in order to keep parents from fully participating. At times, educator resentment manifests when schools make IEP decisions before the meeting with parents, "thereby preventing any meaningful parental input" (Phillips, 2007/2008, p. 1834).

In light of this, it is little wonder that Shelby had to take such extreme measures to secure special education services for her son Dylan. It is also clear why the school suddenly became so responsive to her requests after she hired an advocate. Apparently schools will avoid mandates to provide special education services if they can get away with it. Educator resentment may also help to explain Shelby's lack of knowledge about manifestation determination and other options in special education. Despite her training and involvement as a parent advocate for the district, she did not know about her rights or

her son's rights, and did not know how to advocate for him. Natalie's commitment to teach parents the vocabulary of education is also important, so that in meetings rife with "education jargon," parents have a better chance at being able to fully participate. As Elena noted, it remains in some schools' best interest not to let parents know "too much" about their rights. Such information in the hands of concerned parents will cost schools time and money.

Group Dynamics

Another important area of awareness for the participants was learning to work on the project teams. Although each of the project groups had challenges with communication, commitment, and personality conflicts, the second-year groups either had fewer problems, or simply handled their problems more effectively. The types of conflict that the PEP participants experienced fall under one or more of the following categories: task, relationship, and process (Martínez-Moreno, Zornoza, González-Navarro, & Thompson, 2012). Task conflict arises when members find that they have different perspectives pertaining to an assignment. Relationship conflict results from incompatibilities and includes feelings of tension and friction. Process conflict results when members have different opinions about the steps needed to accomplish a task. Both task and process conflict can lead to relationship conflict. Process conflict is "the most consistently harmful form of early conflict" (Martínez-Moreno et al., 2012, p. 170). All organizational arrangements have the potential for conflict and therefore must address factors such as problems of "free riders," commitment, and monitoring compliance with regulations (Ostrom, 1990).

The PEP groups struggled with interpersonal conflicts related to tasks, relationships, and processes. Tina, who was in the first-year PBIS group, mentioned that her group had communication issues and different perspectives on how to complete the project. Because Tina described the disagreements as resulting from initially not understanding the project and then later relating to disagreements about execution, it appears that her group experienced both a task conflict and an early process conflict. She mentioned that there were many different opinions about how to implement the project but no one was communicating clearly. If group members took these disagreements personally, they likely contributed to the breakdown in the relationships within the group. Tina described one of the group members as leaving after one of her suggestions for a site for the project fell through. Perhaps she felt that she was unable to meet the "norms" or expectations of the group and focused her energy elsewhere. Tina and Robin, the only two who remained to work on the project, benefitted from the support that their small group offered. Tina stated that she and Robin committed to finishing the project. More importantly, Tina reasoned that they remained committed because of the relationship that they had with each other. "Otherwise," Tina insisted, "we would not have completed our project." Tina also indicated that they included a third group member on the final report, but this person did not contribute. She received the benefit of graduating with the group without having to pay the cost of contributing (Ostrom, 1990).

The first-year RJ group also suffered from a lack of understanding initially and disagreements about what to do. Norms shape the way group members interact, defining what behaviors should and should not be executed (Forsyth, 2006). Shelby suggested that because of the lack of consequences for violating group norms, they had a number of

free riders as well. Shelby mentioned that there were no grades and it did not cost them anything to not participate. Economist Elinor Ostrom (1990) would argue that both groups needed "low-cost monitoring" and sanctions for misbehavior, or failing to cooperate (Ostrom, 1990; Wilson, Kauffman, & Purdy, 2011).

The second-year groups likely experienced less task or process conflict because Hope had a year's experience overseeing the projects at that point and both groups had the benefit of a mentor, albeit the mentors were not heavily involved. The second-year PBIS group only had one member who experienced conflict—Anne. Because I never interviewed Anne, I cannot identify with certainty the source of her conflict. Based on the interviews with Adele and Shannon, it seemed that Anne's conflict could have resulted from not adopting the norms that the other group members held. According to Donelson Forsyth (2006), when a group forms, the members typically have to determine where they fit and what is their role; when people cannot meet the expectations of that role, they are more likely to leave the group. Knowing all along that she was the only one with an orange personality may have made her feel like she did not belong, or it is possible that because of her personality she really just did not fit in. The remaining participants, however, got along fine. There were no free riders and each person felt like she had a place on the team. As Adele said about her group, "we literally had people who gravitated towards their skill set…we had people that rolled into their place." For the second-year RJ group, things did not roll into place until the tasks were divided and people could go their separate ways. The source of conflict was more about process. They knew what they wanted to do but disagreed over how it should be done. Leslie stated that the group had a lot of "chiefs" and a lot of disagreement. Once group

members were free to complete their individual parts, everything was fine. Perhaps because the relationships existed before the work in PEP, the process conflict did not turn into relationship conflict that would destroy the group.

Engaging in Advocacy to Build Social and Political Capital

There are many ways to conceptualize power, but relational power is critical for organizing groups (Warren & Mapp, 2011). Relational power is the capacity to work with others, to create a "win-win situation" (p. 27). The shared histories and identities among the PEP group members fostered relational power through "bonding" social capital, the social capital that comes from connections to people who are similar. PEP also "bridged" social capital with others in the community who did not necessarily have the same history or identity, but were interested in supporting PEP's work. Warren and Mapp (2011) identify "bonding" and "bridging" social capital as key to increasing power in a group.

Community organizing builds relational power, or social capital, so that it may employ "the power of numbers" to influence educational outcomes (Mediratta, Shah, & McAlister, 2009, p. 5). Additionally, the members of community organizations use their knowledge about school issues and potential solutions along with relationships with those who have sway in decision-making. PEP's projects have reached more than 50 parents (and over 100 parents and students) in two years. Each of these parents potentially can help further PEP's cause. The more relationships that PEP has with the community, the greater its social capital. Social capital can, "when linked to an institutional base, provide the foundation for political action" to demand greater accountability from the school

district (Mediratta, Shah, & McAlister, 2009). PEP's connection with Christ Church or another institutional base can increase PEP's influence in the community.

Relationships that people can leverage for influence are often present in a community, but insufficient for creating change. Mediratta, Shah, and McAlister argue that communities of color typically lack political capital, or political power, which I define as influence in the policy-making realm. Political power includes the democratic control over economic and cultural resources (Mediratta, Shah, & McAlister, 2009). One shortfall of Warren and Mapp's theoretical framework is that it does not insist on building political power. (Although individual organizations within their study build political power, Warren and Mapp's overall framework focuses on social and relational power.) Even though the Black community has attempted to gain political power through voting rights, electoral votes and representation in Congress, and by electing Black people to office (Brown-Nagin, 2011; Clark, 1986; Harris, 2001), these means are insufficient without economic power and institution building (O'Donnell & Karanja, 2000; Wilson, 2011). Having and sharing wealth is essential because without it, "the social conditions for exploitation, oppression and inequality as well as deprivation and suffering are increased" (Karenga, 1996, p. 549).

The second-year PBIS team had an opportunity to build social, and potentially political capital with Christ Church. Minister Corben stated that Christ Church is a "community-minded" church and has already shown a commitment to improving education in the community. According to Gaines (2010), this is precisely what the modern Black church should be doing. By advocating for equity in education, the modern Black church is fighting for the civil rights issue of our time. As one former

organizer stated in Mediratta, Shah, and McAlister's (2009) study, " 'If there are churches [in a community], you work with them. It would be silly not to' " (p. 24). An alliance with Christ Church and other community-minded religious institutions with a passion for education could help PEP realize the kinds of changes that they want to see in the community. According to Minister Corben, Christ Church's pastor was influential in changing the face of leadership in the county by getting the first African American male principal in the district hired less than five years ago. Black clergy like the pastor of Christ Church are in a unique position to further the causes of community organizations. During the civil rights era in particular, the church led many community-organizing efforts (Gaines, 2010; McCray, Grant, & Beachum, 2010; Morris, 1984). Church leaders are not accountable to anyone outside of their faith community the ways that teachers and elected board members are (Hale, 2001; Wilson, 2011). Thus, they need not fear retaliation in the form of lost jobs or lost votes for taking a stand against injustice in schools.

According to Wilson (2001), the Black church is currently the most viable, Black-controlled institution in the U.S. Historically it has provided for economic development in a number of African American communities. Every year, the Black church as a whole collects $2-3 billion. The federal government provides funding to faith-based initiatives to support education reform. Between the church's revenue and the federal government's financial support, the Black church has the potential to help PEP develop the political capital it needs in its village.

Analyzing Opportunities and Constraints to Building Power

Constraints in School Spaces

One of the greatest constraints to PEP's work was resistance in the schools. Although schools claim to want more parental involvement, Shannon and Robin felt unwelcomed in their children's schools. Elena articulated the challenges with getting schools to respond to requests for information. Hope described how parents' attempts to advocate for their children result in even more mistreatment or "bullying." The impact of "space" on parental involvement is important for understanding how parents engage in their children's education. Spaces are "constituted by underlying structures and resources, have weak boundaries, and are sites of contestation within which culture is produced and actors utilize a particular organization of resources" (Barton, Drake, Perez, St. Louis, and George, 2004, p. 5). These underlying structures and resources have developed, or can develop unjust spaces (Soja, 2010).

There are at least three kinds of spaces in which parents engage with schools: school based academic, school based non-academic, and community/home based (Barton et al., 2004). Even though parents must contend with multiple demands on their time and energy, schools deem a parent's level of involvement in accordance with his or her ability to attend both academic (e.g. curriculum night, parent conferences) and non-academic (e.g. fundraisers, field trips) school events. A broader conception of space recognizes that school spaces are not the only ones in which parents can engage, but they are often the only spaces that schools deem valuable.

Schools expect parents to engage in certain spaces. A school deems a parent "involved" if the school witnesses the parent taking part in school-related events and

supporting the work of the teachers. This may be why Adele had little problem with getting involved in her daughters' school. She was there to support her children doing well, but not necessarily to question the school's work. Shannon met resistance when trying to get into the sacred territory of the teacher's classroom, but she was welcomed as a weekly volunteer in the media center. Educators mark the spaces in which parents can engage. They want parents involved, but typically only in ways that support the school.

Organizing groups historically have not attempted to engage in school spaces because it is so difficult to gain access (Mediratta, Shah, & McAlister, 2009). As Natalie mentioned, educators have taken advantage of parents' trust of the school system to raise their children, and have shut parents out of the school. Many teachers are hesitant to trust parents with too much involvement in school. A survey of over 1,000 educators showed that teachers generally support parental involvement that supports instruction but not parental involvement in the governance of schools. In response to the question, "How important are each of the following types of parental involvement for your students?" over 90% of respondents felt that parental support of activities such as teaching good work habits and stressing the value of education were very or extremely important. Only 12% believed that attending school board meetings and participating in curriculum planning were very or extremely important. Worse, 19% responded that it has no effect on student success and 2% agreed that this type of participation is potentially detrimental to student success (Horace Mann Educator Advisory Panel, 2007).[13]

[13] The methodology for this survey was not explicit in the study. Most of the respondents were elementary school teachers. No demographic information about the participants is provided. The survey relies on voluntary responses and is therefore susceptible to response bias.

Keeping it "Real": Opportunities in the Community

PEP had a number of opportunities to build social capital in the community by building trust with parents, particularly during the second year. Natalie noted that when the PBIS team gave factual information to parents, whether they wanted to hear it or not, that built trust in the community. Bringing that information from the perspective of a parent as opposed to a teacher or administrator also helped to build trust between PEP and the community. Similarly, Melanie noted that the second-year RJ team brought "real" information to the Kids Klub parent support group by opening "a can of worms" and letting parents know that if their children were having problems, those problems could be the parents' fault. Reaching out and sharing information from a parent's perspective, and being sometimes painfully honest with parents were two ways that the PEP members built trust.

Charles Payne (2008) argued that social trust might be the most important factor in school reform. During 1991-1997, the Consortium on Chicago School Research surveyed staff at 210 schools on teacher-teacher and teacher-principal relational trust. The results indicate that schools with high trust levels show the greatest gains on standardized tests, but schools with weak trust levels show practically no gains. A lack of trust yields negative outcomes beyond low test scores. Payne shares a story about a stranger bringing a pot of gold to a school. Instead of graciously receiving the gift, however, the teachers question the stranger's motives. Payne uses this illustration to show how demoralized schools will have difficulty making rational decisions. This certainly applied in Dunham County. Melia wanted to bring a pot of gold in the form of restorative practices to the teachers in Dunham County, but the district's culture of

bullying left the teachers too afraid to accept it. Similarly, parents and children bring pots of gold in the form of suggestions of ways to meet children's needs, but schools sometimes refuse. This happened in the case that Hope described about the parent of a child in special education who questioned a teacher's methods. All the parent and child wanted was to reach a compromise.

This idea that high levels of relational social trust positively affects a school's academic success likely applies for any group working on any reform agenda, and speaks to the importance of developing relationships in organizing work. This is where PEP emulates the legacy of the organizing tradition of women during the civil rights era. Ella Baker, Septima Clark, and Bernice Robinson, among many others, viewed relationships as foundational to any long-term campaign and they invested considerable time in local communities to develop them. Relationships are at the heart of organizing. Relationships foster social capital, and social capital enables organizations to exercise power with public institutions like school systems (Warren & Mapp, 2011).

Moving Toward Activism

Beginning the "Real" Work

PEP can improve its future efforts through ongoing actions with other PEP graduates. As Shelby and Sabrina noted, having the graduates come together monthly or even quarterly to stay connected to DCP3 and PEP's work is important. The investment in the parents over the course of the nine months is certainly not wasted, but it is likely not sufficiently harnessed, either. Committing to mentoring a new group may be too much for most of the parents. Working full time and raising children while going through PEP the first time as participants required a sacrifice of time and energy that

some were not ready to go through again as mentors. Shelby well articulated many of the shortcomings of the program when she said that she simply was not ready to go through the program all over again as a mentor, but she wanted to stay connected to the work. Both Shelby and Leslie were hoping for more training and experience in advocating for policy. According to Sabrina, this is where the "real" work begins, and this is where the alumni can make the most impact. Although they are invited to come and participate with the future classes, and even to participate in other DCP3 events, it seems that they really need their own space that is designed just for them to keep the momentum going without burdening them with a similar level of commitment as PEP required.

Advocacy and activism overlap but have some nuances of difference in meaning. Advocates tend to speak or act on behalf of another person or organization (Do Something, n.d.). Generally, advocates speak on behalf of someone or argue in favor of something and they act through lobbying or legislation. The PEP participants did their advocacy through their community projects. Activism refers to "intentional action" to bring about change or achieve a political or social goal (Do Something, n.d.; Zeitz, 2008). For PEP, these intentional actions could include letter writing, campaigning, rallies, or blogging in addition to continued engagement in the community. Activism insinuates a sustained commitment to change, to stay with a project until achieving the end result, or at least until reaching some intermediate goal that improves the community.

Policy Implications

Institutional transformation is the ultimate goal of any community organizing effort (Warren & Mapp, 2011). Substantial changes in schools often take more than five years, although modest changes can result in 1-2 years (Mediratta, Shah, & McAlister).

With PEP just in its third year of operation, research suggests little expectation for any measurable impact to have taken place at the institutional level. In order for organizing groups to see substantial, lasting change, they have to persist in their work. Further, the high turnover of educational stakeholders such as superintendents and principals, particularly in urban districts, can impede progress gained from short-term wins when leaders leave their positions. Organizing groups improve their chances of success at the institutional level when three factors are in place: a favorable political climate in the district; the desires of the organization converge with those of the district's reform agenda; and when organizations and school systems understand each other's motivation, goals, and culture (Mediratta, Shah, & McAlister, 2009).

In a favorable political climate, organizations can push for reforms if they have adequately framed the problem. Framing theory refers to an organization's ability to change the public's perception—determining not just what to think but also how to think about an issue (Mediratta, Shah, & McAlister, 2009). As Hope mentioned, DCP3 and PEP's goal is to change the narrative around the perception that "those bad kids" deserve punishment. Framing theory suggests that by changing the narrative, organizations can convince leaders to consider their demands.

In the policy literature, John Kingdon (1984) offers three explanations for how issues are placed on a political agenda: problems, politics, and visible participants. Some problems will receive attention based on the ways in which they are defined (framed), and how policymakers come to learn about them. If a problem threatens important values, for instance, policymakers are more likely to feel that something must be done about it. Yet, action on a problem must also be politically feasible. The climate and

proximity to elections weighs more heavily than the wishes of any organized interests seeking to advance a problem on the agenda. The work of visible and hidden participants also plays a role. High-profile leaders have considerable say in what gets advanced on the agenda. Hidden participants, such as any community of specialists in a field, offer alternatives but rarely set the agenda. Policy entrepreneurs (people who invest their resources in return for future policy change) are particularly influential. By taking advantage of policy windows (usually created by the intersection of a problem and a change in the political climate), entrepreneurs can advance their agendas. In short, organizing groups can convince boards of education to respond to their demands when the timing is "right."

A related concept is the idea of interest convergence. Conditions (such as disproportional application of exclusionary discipline) become problems worthy of attention when those in power perceive the condition as a problem (Bell, 1996; Kingdon, 1984). Organizers must first frame the condition as a problem. Part of this framing may require helping policymakers see how the condition affects them. Wilson's (2011) discussion of power relations between Black and White people remind us that dominant Whites (such as Dunham County's all-White school board) are unlikely to have an interest in the concerns of children of color or children in special education, unless improving the situation for those children will somehow benefit dominant Whites (Bell, 1996). Some participants perceived that the board was not particularly concerned with DCP3 and PEP's interests, although very recently the board has agreed to meet with DCP3 to begin discussing discipline policies.

School systems and organizing groups differ in their source of motivation, goals, and culture (Mediratta, Shah, & McAlister, 2009). School systems tend to be top-down, hierarchical, compliance-driven organisms. In contrast, organizing groups are participatory, democratic, and oriented to solving problems. Problems arise when one side does not understand the other. Organizing groups may believe that school systems are not doing enough for their children. They are willing to agitate the community to stir them to action. School and district officials fear that organizing groups do not fully understand the limitations they have to act and the complexity of schools. Conversely, schools do not understand that community groups do not organize to support the school's existing agenda. When both sides develop a mutual understanding of the differences in culture and motivation, productive reform can follow.

Troubling the Frameworks

When I began this study, I relied on Saul Alinsky's work as my introduction to community organizing. Seeking more recent scholarship that focused specifically on education reform, I turned to Warren and Mapp's (2011) model. In many ways, the Parent Empowerment Program (PEP) operated in accordance with this model. Using the metaphor of a tree, Warren and Mapp identified three elements—shared organizing traditions, histories, and identities—at the roots of organizing. PEP's roots were in the tradition of Black women's shared organizing experiences. Also at PEP's roots of organizing were the participants' shared history of experiencing educational injustice and shared identity in the African American cultural heritage—a heritage tradition that has been open to other influences as well. Warren and Mapp identify two core processes in the tree trunk: building relationships and building power. PEP's core processes do

include building relationships and building power, but PEP also spends considerable time building awareness in preparation for those advocacy efforts that build relational power. Warren and Mapp's model accounts for opportunities and constraints in the environment that affect an organization's core processes. The PEP participants identified constraints to their ability to work in the community, and when they encountered resistance, they also identified new opportunities. Finally, in the branches of Warren and Mapp's model are the outcomes of organizing: transformed individuals, communities, and institutions. Although this study did not examine evidence of transformation in the community or in institutions, it did identify evidence of individual transformation and the potential for community transformation.

The Warren and Mapp model has some limitations, however. Mediratta, Shah, and McAlister's (2009) Theory of Action fills in one critical gap in Warren and Mapp's model, namely that in order for transformation to occur, PEP would need to pursue political power in addition to relational power as part of its core process. Neither Warren and Mapp's model nor the Theory of Action insists on institution building so that organizations can be financially solvent. Herein lies the value in O'Donnell and Karanja's (2000) African-centered model. PEP would benefit from institution building, or at least partnering with an existing institution that has economic and cultural resources, like the Black church. Further, although Warren and Mapp's model alludes to the importance of culture, it lacks detail on how African American culture contributes to the organizing process. The African-centered model and Laing's (2009) culture-based organizing model help to fill in this cultural gap by identifying specific contributions of the African American cultural heritage. Even with these two culturally relevant models,

however, there are limitations. Both have broader implications and do not focus specifically on education reform. Further, O'Donnell and Karanja's model is specifically based on experiences with low-income communities. Typically, community organizing for education reform considers how a lack of resources contributes to poor academic experiences in the classroom. This study did not investigate how Dunham County's financial resources may contribute to inequitable treatment in the classroom. This is potentially an area of future research.

Contribution to the Literature

PEP's organizing/educating model shares many of the strengths of existing models, but the group has struggled to sustain long-term activism among its graduates. This study unearths the cultural, intellectual, institutional, inspirational, social, and political resources necessary for PEP to sustain its active commitment to the community. This study also offers considerations for researchers who wish to assess community-based education reform efforts rooted in African American communities.

I posit that any effective, sustained organizing work in African American communities should have a foundation in the African American cultural heritage. Specifically, this work should operate in the tradition of Black women organizing, privileging relationships, and indigenous leadership. It will incorporate a critique of systemic inequities and insist upon a commitment to the community, which I refer to as a village consciousness.

In addition to a foundation in the African American cultural heritage, sustained community organizing work requires intellectual resources. PEP's participants were able to gain awareness and advocate in their communities because of the intensive training

that they received. The "bridged" social capital that Hope and the other co-founders had with community members made it possible for PEP to bring in workshop facilitators like Courtney. Successful education reform requires connections with people who have knowledge of the educational landscape and can communicate that knowledge to parents who lack a background in education.

Third, sustained organizing work requires institutional resources. In an ideal world, parents would have been able to rely on the schools for institutional support. Although some of PEP's projects were in schools, the participants encountered resistance there as well. The Willow Grove Apartment Complex and the Kids Klub created spaces for the participants to engage in advocacy work. Yet one of the strongest institutional resources for PEP was Christ Church. In African American communities in general, the church has been and remains a source of financial strength and an ideal partner in education reform. Those who attend church regularly are in the habit of coming together as a community. In this way they form a natural audience for any organization wishing to present an opportunity to learn more about education reform.

One key ingredient missing in all of the models mentioned thus far is the prominence of the charismatic leader. I find this intriguing because the organizing literature makes mention of leaders of organizations, but with the exception of Laing's (2009) work, makes no mention of their necessity. (Although discussions on the Black church's involvement in the civil rights era clearly identify charismatic clergy as instrumental to organizing work.) Laing describes the "cult personality" of the UNIA under Marcus Garvey and the SCLC under Martin Luther King, Jr. (In contrast, she makes no claims of a cult personality in the BPP under Huey Newton and Bobby Seale.)

She suggests that the strength of these organizations was intimately connected to these charismatic leaders; the organizations ultimately waned in their influence under subsequent leadership. Although Hope is only one of three co-founders, she is PEP's primary leader. Further, while I see PEP's approach as fundamentally different from Saul Alinsky's methods, Hope does share that radical and rebellious spirit that made Alinsky so effective. Whether or not PEP could withstand losing Hope remains to be seen, but there is no question of the magnitude of her contribution to the organization's success.

PEP has successfully generated social power through its multiple connections to members of the community, but it definitely needs to build political power in order to make the systemic changes that it seeks. Again, PEP needs to create a space for the alumni to continue its involvement in this work. Before participants graduate each spring, there should be something in place—a social event, an action item, a community event, a calendar with quarterly meetings—for the participants to connect to in order to keep the momentum going. Sustained activism is key to making the long-term changes necessary to reverse the trends in Dunham County's discipline data.

Finally, this study exemplifies how to conduct African-centered research with community organizations. My education and training as a researcher certainly contributed to my technical ability to design and conduct a research study. I am confident that it was my ability to build a relationship with Hope and each of the participants that made this work possible. My sensitivity to cultural nuances enabled me to identify and interpret the influence of the African American cultural heritage in PEP's processes. And without my deepening African consciousness and a full understanding of

and respect for African-centered epistemology, I would not have been able to interpret accurately my participants' knowledge claims. Although I am a researcher, I am also an advocate who had to balance multiple ethical considerations in order to tell a fair and honest story about PEP's work. My experiences in the classroom and my formal and informal education compel me to support PEP's efforts. My respect for Hope and each of the participants demands that I tell the truth about PEP's strengths and weaknesses. I acknowledge that this was challenging but I believe that I have been successful in this effort.

Final Thoughts

The PEP members emerged from this program as knowledgeable community leaders. They led other parents to increase their awareness of their ability to take action in the community and in their schools. Consequently, the PEP members developed power. The PEP participants developed social power through their projects and laid the foundation for the development of political power. The first-year PBIS team reached a small group of parents and children. The second-year PBIS team significantly improved upon this effort, by reaching over 100 parents and children in their four community projects. Although PEP has only been working in the community for two years, the organization shows promise of making an impact in the community. An area of future research is to determine what impact the organization has had on students and the school system after 1-3 additional years of sustained effort. Because the organization has only been operating for two years, not enough time has passed to measure this impact. Further, the design of this study did not allow for the collection of student outcome data.

The Obama Administration is the first in our nation's history to issue guidance on reducing disparities in school discipline rates. (See Appendix C for more information.) Although the guidance is an important first step, it does not mandate actions on the part of the schools beyond what the law already requires—not to discriminate against children on the basis of race, national origin, or disability. PEP's work is timely and serves as a model for other organizations that want to commit to reducing disparities without having to wait on the school system to do what is fair and just on behalf of children. The keys to making sustained change depend on the organization's ability to draw on the cultural strengths of the participants and engage graduates of the program in sustained activism in the community.

References

Abdi, A. A. (2008). Europe and African though systems and philosophies of education: 'Re-culturing' the trans-temporal discourses. *Cultural Studies, 22*(2), 309-327.

Activism vs. advocacy. *Do Something.* Retrieved February 15, 2014 from http://www.dosomething.org/training/activismandadvocacy/actvism-vs-advocacy

Adams, C. (2008, November/December). The talk-it-out solution: How can you promote safety? Try getting rid of the metal detectors. *Scholastic Administrator*. Retrieved February 14, 2014 from http://www.scholastic.com/browse/article.jsp?id=3750554

Advancement Project. (2005, March). *Education on lockdown: The schoolhouse to jailhouse track.* Washington, DC: Author.

Advancement Project (2010, January). *Test, punish and push out: How "zero tolerance" and high stakes testing funnel youth into the school-to-prison pipeline.* Washington, DC: Author.

Akoto, A. (1994). Notes on an Afrikan-centered pedagogy. In M. J. Shujaa (Ed.), *Too much schooling, too little education: A paradox of black life in white societies* (pp. 319-337). Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.

Alexander, M. (2012). *The new Jim Crow: Mass incarceration in the age of colorblindness* (Rev. ed.). New York: The New Press.

Alinsky, S. D. (1971). *Rules for radicals: A pragmatic primer for realistic radicals.* New York: Vintage.

American Civil Liberties Union. (2008). Locating the school-to-prison pipeline [Fact sheet].

American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force. (2008). Are zero tolerance policies effective in the schools? An evidentiary review and recommendations. *American Psychologist, 63*(9), 852-862.

Anyon, Jean. (2005). *Radical possibilities: Public policy, urban education, and a new social movement.* New York: Routledge.

Asante, M. K. (1990). *Kemet, Afrocentricity and knowledge.* Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.

Asante, M. K. (1991, September 23). Putting Africa at the center. *Newsweek,* 118.

Asante, M. K. (2001). African American studies: The future of the discipline. *The Black Scholar, 22*(3), 20-29.

Bakari, R. S. (1997, April). Epistemology from an Afrocentric perspective: Enhancing Black students' consciousness through an Afrocentric way of knowing. Paper presented at the meeting of the People of Color in Predominantly White Institutions National Conference, University of Nebraska, Lincoln.

Barton, A. C., Drake, C., Perez, J. G., St. Louis, K., & George, M. (2004). Ecologies of parental engagement in urban education. *Educational Researcher, 33*(4), 3-12.

Bell, D. (1996). Serving two masters: Integration ideals and client interests in school desegregation litigation. In K. Crenshaw, N. Gotanda, G. Peller, & K. Thomas (Eds.), *Critical Race Theory: The key writings that formed the movement* (pp. 5-19). New York: New Press.

Bell, J. & Ridolfi, L. J. (2009). *Adoration of the question: Reflections on the failure to reduce racial & ethnic disparities in the juvenile justice system.* San Francisco: Haywood Burns Institute.

Blackmon, D. A. (2009). *Slavery by another name: The re-enslavement of black Americans from the Civil War to World War II.* New York: Anchor.

Blanchett, W. J. (2014). African American students and other students of color in special education. In H. R. Milner IV and K. Lomotey (Eds.), *Handbook of urban education* (pp. 271-284). New York: Routledge.

Boggs, G. L. (2011, July/August). Education: The great obsession. *Monthly Review, 63*(3). (Original work published 1970)

Boyd, T. M. (2009). Confronting racial disparity: Legislative responses to the school-to-prison pipeline. *Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review, 44,* 571-580.

Boykin, A. W. & Noguera, P. (2011). *Creating the opportunity to learn: Moving from research to practice to close the achievement gap*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Braithwaite, J. (2002). *Restorative justice and responsive regulation.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*, 77-101.

Brown-Nagin, T. (2011). *Courage to dissent: Atlanta and the long history of the Civil Rights Movement*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Building the legacy: IDEA 2004. U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved February 9, 2014 from http://idea.ed.gov/

Chavous, T. M., Rivas-Drake, D., Smalls, C., Griffin, T., & Cogburn, C. (2008). Gender matters, too: The influences of school racial discrimination and racial identity on academic engagement outcomes among African American adolescents. *Developmental Psychology, 44*(3), 637-654.

Children's Defense Fund. (1975). *School Suspensions: Are They Helping Children?* Cambridge, MA: Author.

Clark, S. (1986). *Ready from within: Septima Clark and the Civil Rights Movement* (C. S. Brown, Ed.). Navarro, CA: Wild Tree.

Correctional Service Canada (2012). International perspectives on restorative corrections: A review of the literature. Retrieved November 27, 2013 from http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/003/005/003005-4004-eng.shtml

Crotty, M. (2006). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process.* Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Dance, L. J. (2002). *Tough fronts: The impact of street culture on schooling.* New York: Routledge.

Davidson, C. (2009). Transcription: Imperatives for qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 8*(2), 35-52.

Davies, C. B. & M'Bow, B. (2007). Towards African diaspora citizenship: Politicizing an existing global geography. In K. McKittrick & C. Woods (Eds.), *Black geographies and the politics of place* (pp. 14-45). Cambridge, MA: South End Press.

Denzin, N. (2004). The art and politics of interpretation. In S. N. Hesse-Biber & P. Leavy (Eds.), *Approaches to qualitative research: A reader on theory and practice* (pp. 447-472). New York: Oxford University Press.

Diaz-Strong, D., Gómez, C., Luna-Duarte, M. E., & Meiners, E. (2012). Undocumented Latino youth: Strategies for accessing higher education. In P. Noguera, A.

Hurtado, & E. Fergus (Eds.), *Invisible no more: Understanding the disenfranchisement of Latino men and boys* (pp. 166-179). New York: Routledge.

Digeser, P. (1992). The fourth face of power. *The Journal of Politics, 54*(4), 977-1007.

Dilulio, J. (1995, November 27). The coming of the super-predators. *The Weekly Standard, 1*(11), 23.

Dilulio, J. (1996, February 28). Fill churches, not jails: Youth crime and "'superpredators.'" *Brookings.* Retrieved February 8, 2014 from http://www.brookings.edu/research/testimony/1996/02/28crime-diiulio

Diop, C. A. (1989). *The cultural unity of Black Africa.* London: Karnak House.

Dwyer, K. P. (n.d.) Disciplining students with disabilities. National Association of School Psychologists. Retrieved December 17, 2013 from http://www.nasponline.org

Easton-Brooks, D. (2014). Ethnic-matching in urban schools. In H. R. Milner IV and K. Lomotey (Eds.), *Handbook of urban education* (pp. 97-113). New York: Routledge.

Fabelo, T., Thompson, M. D., Plotkin, M., Carmichael, D., Marchbanks, M. P., & Booth, E. A. (2011, July). *Breaking schools' rules: A statewide study of how school discipline relates to students' success and juvenile justice involvement.* New York: Council of State Governments Justice Center.

Farrow, A., Lang, J., & Frank, J. (2005). *Complicity: How the North promoted, prolonged, and profited from slavery.* New York: Ballantine Books.

Fenning, P. & Rose, J. (2007). Overrepresentation of African American students in exclusionary discipline: The role of school policy. *Urban Education, 42*(6), 536-559.

Ferguson, A. A. (2001). *Bad boys: Public schools in the making of black masculinity.* Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.

Forsyth, D. R. (2006). *Group dynamics* (4th ed.). Belmont, CA: Thomson Higher Education.

Foucault, M. (1994). Sex, power, and the politics of identity (B. Gallagher & A. Wilson, Interviewers; R. Hurley et. al, Trans.). In P. Rainbow (Ed.), *Ethics: Subjectivity and truth* (pp. 163-173). New York: The New Press. (Reprinted from *The Advocate, 400*, pp. 26-30 and 58.)

Foucault, M. (1994). The ethics of the concern for self as a practice of freedom (H. Becker, R. Fornet-Betancourt, & A. Gomez-Muller, Interviewers; P. Aranov & D. McGrawth, Trans.). In P. Rainbow (Ed.), *Ethics: Subjectivity and truth* (pp. 281-301). New York: The New Press. (Reprinted from *Foucault Live: Interviews 1961-1984*, by Lotringer, Ed., 1989, New York: Autonomedia)

Gaines, R. W. (2010). Looking back, moving forward: How the Civil Rights Era Church can guide the modern Black church in improving black student achievement. *The Journal of Negro Education, 79*(3), 366-379.

Gannon, S. & Davies, B. (2007). Postmodern, poststructural, and critical theories. In S. N. Hesse-Biber (Ed.), *Handbook of feminist research: Theory and Praxis* (pp. 71-106). Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Goulet, D. (1971). An ethical model for the study of values. *Harvard Educational Review, 41*(2), 205-227.

Green-Powell, P. A., Hilton, A. A., and Joseph, C. L. (2011). Creating collaborative partnership with local churches to improve academic performance of K-12 public schools. *US-China Education Review, 8*(1), 64-69.

Gregory, A., Skiba, R. J., & Noguera, P. A. (2010). The achievement gap and the discipline gap: Two sides of the same coin? *Educational Researcher, 39*(1), 59-68.

Hale, J. E. (1986). *Black children: Their roots, culture, and learning styles* (Rev. ed.). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Hale, J. E. (2001). *Learning while Black: Creating educational excellence for African American children.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Hall, P. A. (2007). Beyond Afrocentrism: Alternatives for African American studies. In D. P. Aldridge & E. L. James (Eds.), *Africana Studies: Philosophical perspectives and theoretical paradigms* (pp. 232-240). Pullman, WA: Washington State Press.

Harris, J. E. (2001). The African Diaspora in world history and politics. In S. S. Walker (Ed.), *African roots/American cultures: Africa in the creation of the Americas* (pp. 104-117). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Harris, N. (2003). A philosophical basis for an Afrocentric orientation. In A. Mazama (Ed.), *The Afrocentric paradigm* (pp. 111-119). Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.

Henderson, A. T. & Mapp, K. L. (2002). A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement. Austin, TX:

National Center for Family & Community Connections with Schools Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

Hilliard, A. G. (1992). The meaning of KMT (Ancient Egyptian) history for contemporary African American experience. *Phylon, 49*(1/2), 10-22.

Hirschfield, P. J. (2008). Preparing for prison?: The criminalization of school discipline in the USA. *Theoretical Criminology, 12*(1), 79-101.

Hollins, E. R. & Spencer, K. (1990). Restructuring schools for cultural inclusion: Changing the schooling process for African American youngsters. *Journal of Education, 172*(2), 89-100.

Holloway, J. E. (Ed.). (2005). *Africanisms in American culture* (2nd ed.). Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Horace Mann Educator Advisory Panel (2007). "Parental Involvement Survey." Retrieved December 28, 2013 from http://www.horacemann.com/~/media/Documents/Advisory%20panel/parental-involvement.ashx

Horton, M. & Freire, P. (1990). *We make the road by walking: Conversations on education and social change* (B. Bell, J. Gaventa, & J. Peters, Eds). Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Howell, J. C. (2009). *Preventing and reducing juvenile delinquency: A comprehensive framework* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage.

H.R. 3565, 104th Cong., Violent Youth Predator Act of 1996. Retrieved February 8, 2014 from http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/104/hr3565/text

Industrial Areas Foundation (n.d.). *Our initiatives*. Retrieved March 31, 2012 from http://www.industrialareasfoundation.org/initiatives.html.

Jacob, S. A. & Furgerson, S. P. (2012). Writing interview protocols and conducting interviews: Tips for students new to the field of qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report, 17*, 1-10.

Jenkins, M. (2006). Gullah island dispute resolution: An example of Afrocentric restorative justice. *Journal of Black Studies, 37*(2), 299-319.

Johnson-Bailey, J. (2004). Enjoining positionality and power in narrative work: Balancing contentions and modulating forces. In K. de Marrais and S. Lapan (Eds.), *Foundations for research: Methods of inquiry in education and the social sciences* (pp. 123-138). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Kaphagawani, D. N. & Malherbe, J. G. (1998). African epistemology. In P. H. Coetzee & A. P. J. Roux (Eds.), *The African philosophy reader* (pp. 205-216). New York: Routledge.

Karenga, M. (1996) The Nguzo Saba (the seven principles). In M. K. Asante & A. S. Abarry (Eds.), *African Intellectual Heritage: A Book of Sources* (pp. 543-554). Philadelphia: Temple University.

Kelling, G. L. & Wilson, J. Q. (1982, March). Broken windows: The police and neighborhood safety. *The Atlantic Magazine.* Retrieved March 25, 2012 from http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1982/03/broken-windows/4465/1/.

Kershaw, T. (1992). Toward a Black studies paradigm: An assessment and some directions. *Journal of Black Studies, 22*(4), 477-493.

King, J. E. (1994). The purpose of schooling for African American children: Including cultural knowledge. In E. R. Hollins, J. E. King, & W. C. Hayman (Eds.), *Teaching diverse populations: Formulating a knowledge base* (pp. 25-56). Albany: SUNY Press.

King, J. E. & Mitchell, C. A. (1995). *Black mothers to sons: Juxtaposing African American literature with social practice* (Rev. ed.). New York: Peter Lang.

Kuykendall, C. (2004). *From rage to hope: Strategies for reclaiming black and Hispanic students* (2nd ed.). Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree.

Kwate, N. O. (2001). Intelligence or misorientation? Eurocentrism in the WISC-III. *Journal of Black Psychology, 27*(2), 221-238.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2009). *The dream keepers: Successful teachers of African American children* (2nd ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Laing, B. Y. (2009). The Universal Negro Improvement Association, Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and Black Panther Party: Lessons for understanding African American culture-based organizing. *Journal of Black Studies, 39*(4), 635-656.

Lawson, M. A. (2003). School-family relations in context: Parent and teacher perceptions of parent involvement. *Urban Education, 38*(1), 77-133.

Lazar, S. H. (2005). *Bernice Robinson and the Citizenship Education Schools.* Unpublished manuscript.

Lee, C. D. (1994). African-centered pedagogy: Complexities and possibilities. In M. J. Shujaa (Ed.), *Too much schooling, too little education: A paradox of black life in white societies* (pp. 295-318). Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.

Lewis, S. (2009, May). Improving school climate: Findings from schools implementing restorative practices. *International Institute for Restorative Practices.* Retrieved December 26, 2013 from http://www.safersanerschools.org/

Lipman, P. (2003). Chicago school policy: Regulating Black and Latino youth in the global city. *Race, Ethnicity and Education, 6*(4), 331-355.

Losen, D. J. & Martinez, T. E. (2013, April). Out of school & off track: The overuse of suspensions in American middle and high schools. The UCLA Center for Civil Rights Remedies. Los Angeles: Author.

Lyons, H. Z., Bike, D. H., Ojeda, L., Johnson, A, Rosales, R. & Flores, L. Y. (2013). Qualitative research as social justice practice with culturally diverse populations. *Journal for Social Action in Counseling and Psychology, 5*(2), 10-25.

Martin, D. (2008). Pan African metaphysical epistemology: A pentagonal introduction. *The Journal of Pan African Studies, 2*(3), 209-227.

Martínez-Moreno, E., Zornoza, A., González-Navarro, P., & Thompson, L. F. (2012). Investigating face-to-face and virtual teamwork over time: When does early task conflict trigger relationship conflict? *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice, 16*(3), 159-171.

Mazama, A. (2001). The Afrocentric paradigm: Contours and definitions. *Journal of Black Studies, 31*(4), 387-405.

McCray, C. R., Grant, Cosette M., and Beachum, F. D. (2010). Pedagogy of self-development: The role the Black Church can have on African American students. *The Journal of Negro Education, 79*(3), 233-248.

Mediratta, K., Shah, S., & McAlister, S. (2009). *Community organizing for stronger schools: Strategies and Successes.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Mirsky, L. (2007). SaferSanerSchools: Transforming school cultures with restorative practices. *Reclaiming Children and Youth, 16*(2), 5-12.

Morris, A. D. (1984). *The origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black communities organizing for change.* New York: The Free Press.

Muhammad, K. G. (2010). The condemnation of blackness: Race, crime, and the making of modern urban America. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Murrell, P. C. (2001). *The community teacher: A new framework for effective urban teaching*. New York: Teachers College.

Myers, Martha A. (1998). *Race, labor, and punishment in the New South.* Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press.

NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (2005, October). *Dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline.* New York: Author.

Nasir, N. S. (2012). *Racialized identities: Race and achievement among African American youth.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Nicholson-Crotty, S., Birchmeier, Z., Valentine, D. (2009). Exploring the impact of school discipline on racial disproportion in the juvenile justice system. *Social Science Quarterly, 90*(4), 1003-1018.

Nicole, D. (2013, December). ESEA Policy Training. The Advancement Project [Presentation].

Nobles, W. W. (2006). *Seeking the Sakhu: Foundational writings for an African psychology*. Chicago: Third World Press.

Nobles, W. W. (2008). Per Âa Asa Hilliard: The great house of black light for educational excellence. *Review of Educational Research, 78*(3), 727-747.

Noguera, P. A. & Hurtado, A. (2012). Invisible no more: The status and experience of Latino males from multidisciplinary perspectives. In P. Noguera, A. Hurtado, & E. Fergus (Eds.), *Invisible no more: Understanding the disenfranchisement of Latino men and boys* (pp. 1-15). New York: Routledge.

Noy, C. (2008). Sampling knowledge: The hermeneutics of snowball sampling in qualitative research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology, 11*(4), 327-344.

Oakes, J. & Rogers, J. (2006). *Learning power: Organizing for education and justice.* New York: Teachers College.

O'Donnell, S. M. & Karanja, S. T. (2000). Transformative community practice: Building a model for developing extremely low income African-American communities. *Journal of Community Practice, 7*(3), 67-84.

Office for Civil Rights Data Collection (2009/2010). 2009-10 Civil rights data collection definitions. Retrieved October 26, 2013 from http://ocrdata.ed.gov/

Office for Civil Rights Data Collection (2009/2010). 2009-10 School or district reports. Retrieved October 26, 2013 from http://ocrdata.ed.gov/

Oliver, D. G., Serovich, J. M., & Mason, T. L. (2005). Constraints and opportunities with interview transcription: Towards reflection in qualitative research. *Soc Forces, 84*(2), 1273-1289.

Ostrom, E. (1990). *Governing the commons: The evolution of institutions for collective action.* Cambridge University Press.

Patton, M. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Payne, C. M. (1995). *I've got the light of freedom: The organizing tradition and the Mississippi freedom struggle.* Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.

Payne, C. M. (2008). *So much reform, so little change: The persistence of failure in urban schools*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Phillips, E. (2007/2008). When parents aren't enough: External advocacy in special education. *The Yale Law Journal, 117*, 1802-1853.

PICO National Network (n.d.). *Issues and Results.* Retrieved March 31, 2012 from http://www.piconetwork.org/issues.

Podair, J. E. (2001, October). *The Ocean Hill-Brownsville crisis: New York's Antigone.* Retrieved April 1, 2012 from http://www.gothamcenter.org/festival/2001/confpapers/podair.pdf.

Positive Behavioral Supports and the law (n.d.). OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports. Retrieved October 24, 2013 from http://www.pbis.org/school/pbis_and_the_law/default.aspx

Primary Prevention (n.d.). OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports. Retrieved October 24, 2013 from http://www.pbis.org/school/primary_level/default.aspx

Prior, L. (2003). Using documents in social research. Los Angeles: Sage.

Ransby, B. (2003). *Ella Baker and the black freedom movement: A radical democratic vision.* Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.

Raye, B. E. and Roberts, A. W. (2007). Restorative processes. In G. Johnstone & D. W. Van Ness (Eds.), *Handbook of restorative justice* (pp. 211-227). Portland, OR: Willan Publishing.

Renée, M. & McAlister, S. (2011). The strengths and challenges of community organizing as an education reform strategy: What the research says. *Community Organizing as an Education Reform Strategy Series.* Prepared by the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University. Quincy, MA: Nellie Mae Education Foundation.

Richardson, L. & St. Pierre, E. A. (2005). Writing: A method of inquiry. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed.) (pp. 959-978). Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Rios, Victor M. (2011). *Punished: Policing the lives of Black and Latino boys*. New York: New York University Press.

Rivers, S. W. & Rivers, F. A. (2002). Sankofa Shule spells success for African American children. In H. P. McAdoo (Ed.), *Black children: Social, educational, and parental environments* (2nd ed.) (pp. 175 – 189). Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Robinson, J. J. (1997). Parents as allies for alternative assessment. In A. L. Goodwin (Ed.), *Assessment for Equity and Inclusion: Embracing All Our Children* (pp. 297-303). New York: Routledge.

Rubin, H. J. & Rubin, I. S. (2005). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Rudestam, K. E. & Newton, R. R. (2007). *Surviving Your dissertation: A comprehensive guide to content and process* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Schiraldi, V. (2001, February 5). Will the real John Dilulio please stand up. *Washington Post.* Retrieved February 8, 2014, from http://www.commondreams.org/views01/0205-02.htm

School climate and discipline (n.d.). U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved April 6, 2014 from http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/index.html

Schreiber, L. (2000). Overcoming methodological elitism: Afrocentrism as a prototypical paradigm for intercultural research. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 24*, 651-671.

Schutz, A. (2006). Home is a prison in the global city: The tragic failure of school-based community engagement strategies. *Review of Educational Research, 76*(4), 691-743.

Schwandt, T. A. (2007). *The Sage dictionary of qualitative inquiry* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Schwartz, W. (2001). School practices for equitable discipline of African American students. *ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education, 166*, 2-4.

Shade, B. J. (1994). Understanding the African American learner. In E. R. Hollins, J. E. King, & W. C. Hayman (Eds.), *Teaching diverse populations: Formulating a knowledge base* (pp. 175-189). Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Sheldon, S. B. & Epstein, J. L. (2002). Improving student behavior and school discipline with family and community involvement. *Education and Urban Society, 35*(1), 4-26.

Shockley, K. G. (2007). Literatures and definitions: Toward understanding Africentric education. *The Journal of Negro Education, 76*(2), 103-117.

Skiba, R. J. (2000). *Zero tolerance, zero evidence: An analysis of disciplinary practice. Indiana Education Policy Center* (Issue No. SRS2). Indiana University.

Skiba, R. J., Horner, R. H., Chung, C., Rausch, M. K., May, S. L., & Tobin, T. (2011). Race is not neutral: A national investigation of African American and Latino disproportionality in school discipline. *School Psychology Review, 40*(1), 85-107.

Soja, E. W. (2010). *Seeking spatial justice.* Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Spring, J. (2000). *American education* (9th ed.). Boston: McGraw Hill.

St. Pierre, E. A. (2000). Poststructural feminism in education: An overview. *Qualitative Studies in Education, 13*(5), 477-515.

Sugai, G., Horner, R. H., Dunlap, G., Hieneman, M., Lewis, T. J., Nelson, C. M., et al. (2000). Applying positive behavior support and functional behavioral assessment in schools. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions, 2*(3), 131-143.

Sugai, G. & Simonsen, B. (2012). Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports: History, defining features, and misconceptions. Retrieved October 23, 2013 from http://www.pbis.org/common/pbisresources/publications/PBIS_revisited_June19r_2012.pdf

Swartz, E. (2009). Diversity: Gatekeeping knowledge and maintaining inequalities. *Review of Educational Research, 79*(2), 1044-1083.

Tang, S. (2011). Foundational paradigms of social sciences. *Philosophy of the Social Sciences, 4*(2), 211-249.

Tefera, A., Thorius, K. K., & Artiles, A. J. (2014). Teacher influences in the racialization of disabilities. In H. R. Milner IV and K. Lomotey (Eds.), *Handbook of urban education* (pp. 256-270). New York: Routledge.

Templeton, R. (1998, January 1). Superscapegoating: Teen 'superpredators' hype set stage for draconian legislation. FAIR. Retrieved February 8, 2014 from http://fair.org/extra-online-articles/superscapegoating/

Thurlow, M. L., Quenemoen, R. F., & Lazarus, S. S. (n.d.). Meeting the needs of special education students: Recommendations for the Race to the Top consortia and states. *National Center on Educational Outcomes*. Retrieved February 2, 2014 from http://www.cehd.umn.edu/NCEO/onlinepubs/Martha_Thurlow-Meeting_the_Needs_of_Special_Education_Students.pdf

Tillman, L. C. (2002). Culturally sensitive research approaches: An African-American perspective. *Educational Researcher, 31*(9), 3-12.

Tisdale, K. (2004). Being vulnerable and being ethical with/in research. In K. deMarrais and S. D. Lapan (Eds.), *Foundations for research: Methods of inquiry in education and the social sciences* (pp. 13-30). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Torres, M. & Fergus, E. (2012). Social mobility and the complex status of Latino males: Education, employment, and incarceration patterns from 2000-2009. In P. Noguera, A. Hurtado, & E. Fergus (Eds.), *Invisible no more: Understanding the disenfranchisement of Latino men and boys* (pp. 19-40). New York: Routledge.

Townsend, B. (2000). The disproportionate discipline of African American learners: Reducing school suspensions and expulsions. *Exceptional Children, 66*(3), 381-391.

Trainor, A. A. & Bal, A. (2014). Development and preliminary analysis of a rubric for culturally responsive research. *The Journal of Special Education, 47*(4), 203-216.

Turner, D. W. (2010). Qualitative interview design: A practical guide for novice investigators. *The Qualitative Report, 15*(3), 754-760.

Van Ness, D., Morris, A. & Maxwell, G. (2001). Introducing restorative justice. In A. Morris and G. Maxwell (Eds.), *Restorative Justice for Juveniles: Conferencing, Mediation & Circles* (pp. 3-12). Portland, OR: Hart Publishing.

Walker, S. S. (Ed.). (2001). *African roots/American cultures: Africa in the creation of the Americas.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Warren, M. R., Hong, S., Rubin, C. L., & Uy, P. S. (2009). Beyond the bake sale: A community-based relational approach to parent engagement in schools. *Teachers College Record, 111*(9), 2209-2254.

Warren, M. R. & Mapp, K. L. (2011). *A match on dry grass: Community organizing as a catalyst for school reform.* New York: Oxford University.

"What is an IEP?" (n.d.). National Center for Learning Disabilities. Retrieved December 27, 2013 from http://www.ncld.org/students-disabilities/iep-504-plan/what-is-iep

Wilson, A. N. (2011). *Blueprint for black power: A moral, political and economic imperative for the twenty-first century.* New York: Afrikan World InfoSystems.

Wilson, D. S., Kauffman, R. A., & Purdy, M. S. (2011). A program for at-risk high school students informed by evolutionary science. *PLoS One, 6*(11), 1-11.

Wilson, W. J. (1996/1997). When work disappears. *Political Science Quarterly, 111*(4), 567-595.

Wong, C. A., Eccles, J. S., & Sameroff, A. (2003). The influence of ethnic discrimination and ethnic identification on African American adolescents' school and socioemotional adjustment. *Journal of Personality, 71*(6), 1197-1232.

Wynter, S. (1992). No humans involved: An open letter to my colleagues. *Voices of the African Diaspora, 8*(2), 12-16.

Zeitz, P. (2008). What is advocacy? What is activism? [Presentation for Global Health Advocacy and Activism]. Global Aids Alliance. George Washington University. Retrieved February 15, 2014 from http://www.ccaba.org/wp-content/uploads/Paul-Zeitz-What-is-Advocacy-and-What-is-Activism-Compatibility-Mode1.pdf

APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

List of Data Sources

Source	Data
Participants and researcher	23 one-on-one interviews with PEP members, the director, and other community members
	PBIS matrix
"DCP3" website	Application to join "PEP"
	Educational Series Flyer
	Media advisory: Community Conversation Event
	Office for Civil Rights complaint
	YouTube Video
"Dunham" County Schools website	School zones and graduation rates
	Information on schools and school board
"Dunham" County Government	Demographic and community information
Local news sources websites	Information on schools and school board
State Department of Education website	State and district demographics and graduation rates
Office for Civil Rights Data Collection	School district demographics and discipline rates

APPENDIX B

Culturally Centered Ways of Knowing

I attempted to situate each participant within her cultural worldview in order to privilege each participant's way of knowing as a subject of this inquiry not just as an object. This was especially important in getting participants' feedback on the impact that they believed they had with their projects. Although positivist frameworks would require certain types of presumably "objective," detached evidence of any impacts, culturally centered paradigms allow for multiple ways of knowing.

The participants' descriptions of what they reported as significant provide a context for viewing the influence of their cultural heritage/worldview as a way of knowing. For instance, when I asked Robin how she knew that her group's project made an impact, she said that it was "just by how they responded." Like the other participants she "read" impacts from culturally familiar behaviors and expressions. For example, Adele determined that parents at Willow Grove were excited about her group's presentation "because they were nodding, when we did the activity" and because "they actually were writing down things that their child could do." Adele did receive oral feedback as well, by asking the parents directly if they liked the matrix, but she points to these other ways of knowing first. At the culmination of Leslie's group project, she said that she could tell that the parents (and their children) were affected because "they were just happy that they did it and the smiles, the tears, the revelation of after everything they've gone through was a good process for both the parents and the kids."

One way that culturally centered epistemology verifies knowledge claims is through a combination of historical understanding and intuition (Harris, 2003). The PEP members used a combination of cues to let them know that they were making a

difference: body language such as nodding, emotional responses such as crying, and physical actions such as observing the parents writing and taking notes. The PEP members had an intuitive understanding of the impact of the organization's work and how parents responded. This intuitive understanding, when determined by cultural norms that have historically been interpreted to have certain meanings (e.g. nodding heads = agreement), is a valid way to verify knowledge claims in culturally diverse communities, and one that I relied on throughout this study.

APPENDIX C

The School Discipline Guidance

On January 8, 2014, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan presented the Joint Department of Justice (DOJ) and Department of Education (ED) School Discipline Guidance Package at Frederick Douglass High School in Baltimore, Maryland ("School Climate and Discipline," n.d.). In doing so, the Obama Administration became the first federal administration to issue guidance on school discipline. The guidance includes a Dear Colleague letter describing how schools can administer discipline without violating the law. It reminds schools of their requirement to adhere to Titles IV and VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which in short prohibits discrimination based on race, color, national origin, and other identifiers. Consequently, any disciplinary practice that unduly affects students of one race more than another violates federal law. The guidance also includes a Guiding Principles document, which describes steps to guide state and local efforts. The three guiding principles are (a) Climate and Prevention; (b) Clear, Appropriate, and Consistent Expectations and Consequences; and (c) Equity and Continuous Improvement. The third and fourth components in the guidance are the Directory of Federal School Climate and Discipline Resources, which includes the technical assistance available to schools; and the Compendium of School Discipline Laws and Regulations, which compares school discipline laws across the country. To date, six webinars have been scheduled to increase understanding and awareness of this guidance.

APPENDIX D

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Mail: P.O. Box 3999
Atlanta, Georgia 30302-3999
In Person: Alumni Hall
30 Courtland St, Suite 217
Phone: 404/413-3500
Fax: 404/413-3504

March 25, 2013

Principal Investigator: King, Joyce Elaine

Protocol Department: Educational Policy Studies

Protocol Title: Push Back on Push Out

Submission Type: Application H13265

Review Type: Expedited Review, Category 4, 7

Approval Date: March 25, 2013

Expiration Date: March 24, 2014

The Georgia State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and approved the above referenced study in accordance with 45 CFR 46.111. The IRB has reviewed and approved the research protocol and any informed consent forms, recruitment materials, and other research materials that are marked as approved in the application. The approval period is listed above. Research that has been approved by the IRB may be subject to further appropriate review and approval or disapproval by officials of the Institution.

Federal regulations require researchers to follow specific procedures in a timely manner. For the protection of all concerned, the IRB calls your attention to the following obligations that you have as Principal Investigator of this study.

1. For any changes to the study (except to protect the safety of participants), an Amendment Application must be submitted to the IRB. The Amendment Application must be reviewed and approved before any changes can take place

2. Any unanticipated/adverse events or problems occurring as a result of participation in this study must be reported immediately to the IRB using the Unanticipated/Adverse Event Form.

3. Principal investigators are responsible for ensuring that informed consent is properly documented in accordance with 45 CFR 46.116.

   - The Informed Consent Form (ICF) used must be the one reviewed and approved by the IRB with the approval dates stamped on each page.

4. For any research that is conducted beyond the approval period, a Renewal Application must be submitted at least 30 days prior to the expiration date. The Renewal Application must be approved by the IRB before the expiration date else automatic termination of this study will occur. If the study expires, all research activities associated with the study must cease and a new application must be approved before any work can continue.

5. When the study is completed, a Study Closure Report must be submitted to the IRB.

All of the above referenced forms are available online at https://irbwise.gsu.edu. Please do not hesitate to contact Susan Vogtner in the Office of Research Integrity (404-413-3500) if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Cynthia A. Hoffner, IRB Vice-Chair

Federal Wide Assurance Number: 000001